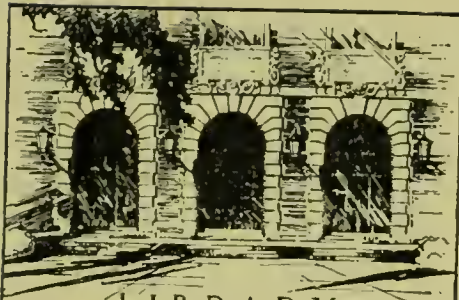




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CHARLES STANLY.

A *Novel*.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "NINFA."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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CHARLES STANLY.

CHAPTER I.

REGINALD, Lord Overdale, Charles Stanly's uncle, was no ordinary man. Nature had endowed him with a strong mind, a noble heart, and rare powers of intellect. But his temper was reserved, and his passions were violent. Above all, his pride was excessive. He felt his mental superiority, with that lofty consciousness, which scorns display. Possibly, under other circumstances, his character might have been modified and softened; but those in which Reginald was placed, were especially unfortunate. His childhood was exposed to unkindness, and, what a child feels still more keenly, to injustice. Treachery the most cruel, and the most undeserved,

blighted his youth, and destroyed the happiness of his after-life.

His father, a kind-natured man, but vain and weak, was incapable of comprehending a character so unlike his own. The shy, ugly boy met neither with sympathy nor encouragement; all the father's affections were centred in James, his youngest son. James was handsome in person, and attractive in manners. He lost no opportunity of pushing himself into notice, and, of course, succeeded. People generally meet with encouragement in exact proportion as they do not require it.

There were certain grand and proud relations of the family, who condescended, at rare intervals, to take some patronising notice of this decayed and collateral branch. On these occasions, James was carefully brought forward, while Reginald was kept in the background. The latter felt this neglect deeply, but he would have died sooner than own it. He would have died rather than let his father suspect how he pined under his unkindness, and how he yearned for sympathy. The old man little imagined what a fund of

affection was concealed under that cold, reserved, unprepossessing exterior.

The grand relations were rich and ostentatious ; Mr. Stanly, though comparatively poor, chose to think it his duty to entertain them in a manner suitable to their illustrious descent. Money was imprudently lavished in vain endeavours to imitate their expensive style of life. But, what in them was profusion, was in Mr. Stanly extravagance. He got into debt. Reginald's advice of timely retrenchment was not listened to. It must be owned that he gave it in no measured terms. He scorned the art of making unpleasant truths palatable. The old man resented his arrogance, and did not follow his counsel.

Thus pecuniary difficulties increased daily. Debts accumulated to a fearful amount ; utter ruin seemed inevitable. Mr. Stanly and James wondered, and deplored, and regretted. In their helplessness, they turned to Reginald for assistance. He hung back moodily, and, at last, tendered a tardy and ungracious aid. But it was impossible to deny his ability. In a very short time, a clear statement of the affairs was made, and

a mode devised by which they might be retrieved, and the debts paid. This was, immediately to retire to some obscure place on the Continent where they might live cheaply.

There was no disputing the soundness of the advice; but it was given in a peremptory tone, which rendered it more than necessarily unpalatable. The old man trembled before his own child, and complained of him to his favourite James. James had an abject fear of his brother; he was envious of his superior abilities, and humbled by the lofty integrity which he could not imitate. He revenged himself by widening the breach between the father and son. Reginald perceived the increased estrangement, and easily divined its source.

Instead of submitting cheerfully to necessity, and making the best of what could not be remedied, the miserable old man sunk, deeper and deeper, into dejection. Discontent engendered disease: he died of a broken heart.

While yet a boy, Reginald had laid out the plan of his future life. He was conscious of remarkable talents, and he determined to rise

by his own exertions. His great ambition was to retrieve his father's fortunes, and to mortify his proud relations, by proving his intellectual superiority over them. His father's death destroyed the virtuous incitement to his energy, but the less worthy stimulants were increased tenfold.

He thought of the misery which his father had endured, and he studied with renewed ardour. He thought of his brother's envious surprise, and he felt sure of success. The brothers had parted at their father's death-bed. Words had passed between them which could never be forgiven. Each accused the other of having killed their parent. Reginald by his cold, harsh behaviour; James by his encouragement to extravagant folly. Reginald was contemptuous; James insulting. They parted in hate, and never met again.

Reginald's success was rapid and signal. At eight-and-twenty, without money, without interest, his name had become celebrated. He was the most promising lawyer at the bar; his political pamphlets were first-rate.

While on one of the circuits, Reginald met with a beautiful girl, and fell deeply in love

with her. She had some little fortune, and he, brilliant prospects. He proposed marriage, and was accepted. Her parents, however, thought it most prudent to put off the union for a time, and insisted upon a year's delay.

During this interval, another suitor paid his addresses to the young lady. This was his own brother, James Stanly. James was handsome, agreeable, and a great conqueror of female hearts. Reginald knew it well.

On his way to court, Reginald first heard of his brother's unworthy conduct. He spoke like one inspired. Never had he exhibited such splendid powers of oratory. His language was as harmonious as his irony was bitter. He carried his whole audience with him.

He did not stay to listen to the praises and congratulations which were showered down upon him from all sides. He hurried away, in order to set out immediately for the place where *she* lived, and to arrive there before notice could be given of his approach.

The night was dark, and he stationed himself, unseen, under her window. The sash was open, for the weather was sultry. Pre-

sently voices were heard, those of his brother, and of the woman whom he loved so well.

She spoke in low, soft tones, such as he believed he alone had power to evoke. Her words were words of love, and they were not addressed to him.

That was enough for Reginald. Maddened with rage and jealousy, but too proud to express those feelings, he left England the following day. He hurried on his journey, for he felt that illness was impending.

He reached a small village in France, where he was seized with a long and dangerous fever. He lay for many weeks between life and death. He recovered, at length ; but his convalescence was slow and painful.

What was his surprise when, on looking over an arrear of newspapers, he found his own demise recorded therein, accompanied by a flaming paragraph, in honour of the virtues and talents of the distinguished dead.

Another announcement followed. The fickle object of his love had been led to the hymeneal altar by his brother, James Stanly, under the title of Baron of Overdale.

His cousin, the late lord, had died, as well

as his two sons; and James, assuming that his elder brother was no more, had appropriated to himself the honours and fortunes of that ancient house. Now, for the first time, Reginald thanked God for his recovery; his energies received a fresh stimulus. Once more he had an object in life. The love which had winged his ambition was converted into hate. *That* should goad him onwards.

He should be revenged of the frail beauty who spurned his attachment. She had been insensible to his love; she should feel his hatred. She should learn the power of the man whom she had slighted. She should be punished where she was most sensitive; her vanity should be humbled, her ambition crushed. The honours, of which she was so unworthy, should be wrested from her. But she should possess them just long enough for enjoyment, not for satiety; she should taste of their sweets, but never suspect their bitters. Thus argued Reginald, and he gloated over the prospect of a revenge, which was as sure as it would be overpowering.

He was in no haste to execute it. He felt that, by delay, it would gain strength and

poignancy. He waited until restored health had put him in full possession of his intellectual powers ; then he composed a political pamphlet, displaying such extraordinary insight, such immense knowledge, and such masterly command of language, that it could not but excite universal surprise and attention. The first edition was published anonymously, and when it had produced the effect which he anticipated, he sent a copy to the premier, signed *Reginald, Baron of Overdale*. On the same morning, an article appeared in several newspapers proving his identity ; and in the evening, Reginald, Lord Overdale, was the centre of attraction at the great official's soirée.

James Stanly was meek, or mean enough to attempt propitiation. It only increased the peer's contempt, and confirmed his hatred. He refused to see his brother, and wrote to him in terms, of which the polished but biting sarcasm was far more galling than would have been the most open invective.

Lord Overdale got into Parliament, and became the leading member of his party. His party got into power, and Lord Overdale was

at its head. For ten years he governed the State. Then came a change of ministry, which relieved him from his post.

Lord Overdale retired into the country, determined never more to mix with politics. He kept his word. When his party again became influential, he resolutely declined office. Entreaties were vain. He had felt his strength, had proved it to the world, and was satisfied. Ambition no longer afforded him excitement. His experience of human nature was unfavourable, he had seen it on its worst side, he loathed the mean selfishness, which he believed universal; and shunned all intercourse with a race of beings whom he despised.

While Lord Overdale was in office, his brother and his brother's wife had both died. He was duly informed of their respective deaths, but vouchsafed no answer to these announcements. The way in which he treated the application made in favour of his orphaned nephew has been already shown. In thus abandoning the child of parents whom he had reason to hate, he believed that he was acting rightly. He thought that he was

following the divine will. His God was a jealous God, whose justice is not tempered with mercy.

Charles Stanly was in the habit of writing, on rare occasions, to his uncle. These letters were coldly acknowledged; generally by the hand of Mr. Jones, Lord Overdale's valet. The peer thought little about his nephew, and cared less; until his attention was aroused by the fame of his duel at Baden, on behalf of Lady Ramsay.

The theme, with stupendous variations, was repeated in the newspapers. In one point only, all of them agreed. The young hero was heir to the titles and fortune of the Baron of Overdale. Such he styled himself, and as such he was evidently courted.

Lord Overdale's hatred towards his nephew received fresh fuel from this announcement. That presumptuous boy, the son of his brother James—*her* son should not, if he could help it, inherit his property. His money was at his own disposal, but as the estate was entailed, the only mode of preventing him from succeeding to it was to marry, and have an heir.

He married accordingly. The daughter of a country neighbour became Lady of Overdale. She was good and gentle, but no more. She was no companion to her husband; he had never intended her to be such.

He treated her, however, with the outward respect due to the Baroness of Overdale, his wife. He was indulgent and forbearing, but it was not in his nature to be either confidential or kind.

In due time she became the mother of a son. Lord Overdale's proud heart swelled with joy. Splendid festivities were given upon the occasion.

But the boy did not thrive; he became more and more sickly. Lady Overdale, too, fell into bad health. The fatigue of attending her child impeded her recovery.

The child pined and died. The mother's grief was intense, but it was nothing in comparison to the father's rage.

He betrayed it, however, neither by word nor look, but he shut himself up in his room, and refused even to see his wife.

In the dead stillness of the night, Lord Overdale rose from his bed. He felt at his

heart a secret longing to take a last look of the little handful of dust which had caused him such extremes of pleasure and of pain. He went to the room where his boy's corpse lay. His wife was there before him; she was kneeling beside her dead baby.

The moonlight streamed in upon her. It made her pale face look paler; and in its expression of intense anguish was mixed one of such angelic resignation, that it awakened in her husband's stern heart, feelings which it had not known for years.

Their eyes met for an instant, but neither spoke. He would not be unmanned; but he took her hand, pressed it within his, and withdrew in silence. This was the first time that Lady Overdale had witnessed any symptom of tenderness in him. The secret spring lay deep hidden in his bosom; a heavy earthy mass had collected and hardened above it—it wanted but the divining rod of sympathy to set it free.

From that moment there was an alteration in Lord Overdale's sentiments towards his wife. He treated her more as a companion than he had hitherto done; he spent much of

his time in her society. Her powers of intellect were limited; she could not converse with him either on political or on literary topics, but her heart was affectionate, and that was all her husband's. She was proud of his superiority over herself, but her love exceeded her admiration.

It was difficult to resist attachment so devoted and so self-forgetting. Lord Overdale was surprised to find himself beginning to reciprocate her feelings. He liked her to be with him. The pleasure his presence afforded her reflected itself, in some degree, upon him.

Lady Overdale, overwhelmed with gratitude, felt as if she could not do enough to please him. She studied his wishes and forestalled them. She took the utmost care of her health, in hopes of having another child. She knew his anxiety for an heir; she had once thought that he cared for her only on that account, but she now chid herself for having harboured unjust feelings towards her indulgent and considerate lord.

But, alas! the blight had been given, the

flower was nipped, and gradually faded away. Sorrow had done its work ; the remedy came too late. In little more than three years after her marriage, Lady Overdale died, the victim of consumption.

Lord Overdale bore his loss with his usual apparent equanimity. Neither regret nor murmur escaped him. He looked haggard and worn ; but, to all inquiries concerning his health, he coldly replied that he was perfectly well.

Not long after the funeral, he set out for Italy, and, after travelling for some months, settled at Rome, where he spent the winter.

Early in the following spring he returned home, much improved in health, and more so in spirits. He was another man. His own servants hardly recognised him.

Mr. Jones threw out sundry mysterious hints, which his companions vainly endeavoured to comprehend. Mr. Jones had travelled with his lordship, and seen many things which it would be wicked to tell, especially concerning a beautiful Italian lady, whom, as it would seem, he had reason to suppose,

was in direct communication with the evil one. “Her *houtlandish* ways were too *orrible* to think on.” However, as he was always talking about her, it may be supposed that he did think about her, nevertheless.

Mr. Jones’s anecdotes concerning this lady were marvellous, and not very intelligible; the other servants, of course, duly appreciated them. They also disapproved of *houtlandish* ways, devoutly believed that everything not English was wrong, and contemned all foreigners with that sturdy patriotism so natural to true-born Britons.

Great, therefore, was their consternation when Lord Overdale one day gave orders that preparations should be made for the reception of strangers. This was an unheard-of event. It boded no good; nor was the universal alarm at all lessened when Mr. Jones declared himself to be perfectly convinced that the expected guests were none others than the *houtlandish* lady and her family; and that she, having what in foreign parts is called the “*hevil heye*,” was sure to bring a curse upon all she met.

But, notwithstanding the counter-charms worn by all the servants, the preparations went on rapidly. Lord Overdale himself superintended their progress, without heeding the ominous looks of Mr. Jones, or the unwonted tardiness of his obedience, in everything concerning the new arrangements.

His assistance, however, was little required. Upholsterers were summoned from London. Suites of apartments, upon which the sun had not shone for years, were opened to the light, and entirely new furnished. The old tapestry was taken down, and cleaned. The old picture-frames were regilt. One suite of smaller rooms especially occupied their owner's care. They were to be arranged after the most commodious fashion, and such as to suit a lady's taste.

As soon as the furnishing of these rooms was satisfactorily accomplished, and the other preparations set on foot, according to his wishes, Lord Overdale set out for London. It was the first time, since his resignation of office, that he had gone there during the season. The amazement of his household can

hardly be imagined; but whatever wonder was felt, none was expressed. Even his peremptory admonition, that by the end of a month everything should be ready to receive himself and a party, whom he intended to bring with him, was heard with portentous, but respectful silence.

CHAPTER II.

· NEARLY four years have elapsed since we saw Lady Ramsay watching by her husband's sick bed. Time had wrought little change in her person, and less in her mind. But if she had not grown wiser, she did not seem to have grown older. Her eyes were as brilliant, her figure as symmetrical, her laugh as silvery as ever; her heart, indeed, appeared lighter. She was, in a great measure, relieved from her former solicitude on Sir James's account. His health was wonderfully improved, and it was to her good nursing, and unremitting attention, that he owed this amendment.

It would seem as if that dreadful illness had produced a salutary crisis. Since then, his fits became less frequent, and less violent. For the last few months, they had altogether

ceased. He was now able to mix in society, and almost to enjoy it. His gratitude and affection for his pretty Fanny knew no bounds. He was always devising some plan for her gratification, or her amusement. He was always talking of her perfections. He never spoke, but to say something in her praise. He absolutely worshipped her.

And she was pleased to be worshipped. She was pleased with herself for deserving this increased affection. She had done her duty thoroughly, and her duty had often been painful. Most women would have shrunk from it. But the more unpleasant the offices, the more pleasure, it would seem, she took in performing them.

The only incident worthy of note, which occurred during the four years' interval, was the death of good old Dr. Foster. He slept with his fathers ; but a new rector did not yet reign in his stead. The whole neighbourhood was in a ferment—everybody wondered who was likely to be his successor. Much interest was made on the occasion, and a vast deal of clerical curiosity excited. Lady Ramsay, as it may be supposed, was not idle, nor Aurora

either. It was known that Lady Ramsay generally accomplished whatever she wished, and it was known that Aurora had great influence with Lady Ramsay; this circumstance, added to that of the Doctor's having left her no inconsiderable fortune, will easily explain the otherwise astounding fact, *i.e.* that Aurora was now a very important personage in the parish.

She was generally supposed to be improved in manner; and some people of an imaginative turn of mind, went so far as to hint, that she was improved in looks also. Two curates ventured to think her complexion less muddy, and one of these suggested the possibility of her having grown taller. He even conceived a misty notion of proposing to her; in furtherance of which, he one day paid her a very early visit. But although, in her eagerness to receive him with the aplomb befitting her new position, she upset the chair on which he was about to sit; and in stooping to pick it up, let a myriad of worsted balls revolve out of her lap; the said enterprising young divine went away, without fulfilling the object of his visit. This gentleman was no other than

Aurora's old friend, Mr. Smith; for whom, during the time that he had been her father's curate, she had conceived extraordinary respect and admiration.

Before the new rector was appointed, Aurora left Eastrow, to spend the ensuing season in London with Lady Ramsay. That lady's unvarying friendship for good little Aurora may seem surprising; but it was, in fact, very natural. Not that they agreed either in tastes, opinions, or pursuits; on the contrary, there never were two people more different. But each was very useful to the other. It may not be complimentary, it is nevertheless true, that in all companionships, or friendship—improperly so called—there are more of interested motives than we are willing to acknowledge. It is a melancholy fact, that we cannot be angels, and while we are men, more or less selfishness will obscure our best feelings. Neither Lady Ramsay nor Aurora were aware of the secret motives that linked them together. Lady Ramsay had no notion that a certain guileless shrewdness in her little friend (while it enabled the said friend to comprehend the manifold and complicated schemes

to which she was so inveterately addicted) caused her to mistake calculating tact for disinterested philanthropy. Aurora believed Lady Ramsay's words to be Gospel truths, and her actions examples of Christian virtue. Aurora was always ready to fight Lady Ramsay's battles to the last gasp, and to uphold her as a standard of perfection. Aurora had overflowing sympathy for all her joys and for all her sorrows; Aurora was always accommodating, ready to go out, or to stay in; Aurora would talk to Sir James, or listen to the prozers; Aurora was never in the way, at least never in Lady Ramsay's way; in fine, Aurora was ugly and unattractive; she was a foil as well as a friend.

Aurora felt that she was useful to Lady Ramsay, and her heart swelled with humble self-complacency. But Lady Ramsay was also very useful to Aurora. Without Lady Ramsay, she would have seen little of the world, and nothing of high society; now Aurora liked all society much, but high society most. Her mother's grandfather had been raised to the peerage, and Aurora inherited a mild form of that upstart pride with

which the newly-made nobility are generally infected.

Lady Ramsay anticipated more than usual pleasure from the amusements of the season. Her head was full of plans on behalf of her family, and Sir James's improved health would enable her to carry them out. She need no longer fear occasionally leaving him at home; thus she might chaperon Arethusa to as many balls as she pleased. Poor Arethusa was getting very weary of her state of single blessedness; she grew thinner and sourer every day, and her anxiety to marry increased in proportion as her chances diminished. In vain she sung her Maniac, and other similarly melodious songs; but of all the gentleman who praised, not one proposed. Lady Ramsay was almost as much disappointed at her sister's matrimonial failures as she was herself. Lady Ramsay had a holy horror of old maids and of old bachelors too; she believed them all to be crooked and cross. Marriage was, to her mind, the only safety-valve against these splenetic explosions to which, as she believed, the single of both sexes are prone; and she had come to London determined to provide

not only her sister with a husband, but also her brother with a wife.

Within the last three years, Frank had risen to still higher eminence in his profession. He had been so completely engrossed by business, that he had not even had time to be much at Eastrow. His visits there had been of late short and few; and even when Lady Ramsay was in London, the different hours they kept rendered their intercourse difficult. They had now been parted for several months.

One morning Lady Ramsay was sitting in her London boudoir, which was quite as pretty as that of Eastrow. She held a letter in her hand, and her eyes beamed with pleasure as she read it. Nor was one perusal sufficient. When she came to the end of the eighth page, she went back to the first, and began the whole over again.

The door opened suddenly. "Good Heavens!" she exclaimed, as she thrust the letter into her pocket, "Frank! This is an unexpected pleasure. When did you come off the 'circuit?' How glad I am to see you!"

Lady Ramsay overwhelmed her brother with expressions of affection. He, though less de-

monstrative, responded with equal warmth and sincerity.

“I am indeed delighted you are come, my dear brother,” she said, motioning him to sit beside her upon the sofa. “I have a hundred things to tell you, and first, a piece of good news to communicate.”

“And I, Fanny, have some news for you.” As he spoke, he took a letter out of his pocket, and gave it to his sister. “Read it,” he added, “and you will see what I mean.”

Lady Ramsay looked at the superscription, with a slight, almost imperceptible shrug of the shoulders. She opened the letter carelessly, but what she read seemed to engross her attention, and made her change colour from pale to red.

“Coming to England!” she mused, half aloud, and in tones of evident dissatisfaction. “What can bring Isabella Romaine so soon back to England?”

“So soon! Why she has been absent nearly four years. But if you will have patience to read to the end of the letter, you will see why she comes. She is to meet Charles Stanly in London, and——”

“ I see, I see,” interrupted Lady Ramsay, impatiently; “ but it is very odd that Charles says nothing about it. I have just heard from him, that *he* is coming, but he does not even mention Isabella’s name.”

“ He was probably uncertain whether it would be in Isabella’s power to leave Italy this year. Her mother has been ill. If you had finished the letter, you would have seen, that it was only on the very day she wrote to me, that their plans were decided. Charles cannot, even now, be aware of the circumstance ; remember, St. Petersburg is a long way from Rome.”

“ Yes, yes. I know all that ; it seems to make her decision of coming to England still more strange. If Charles and she had settled to meet, I could understand it, but——”

“ My dear Fanny, I wish you would learn to collect facts before you draw conclusions ; but since you have not patience to read it yourself, I may as well tell you, that Isabella is coming to England at the urgent request, and by the express invitation, of no less important a person than Charles Stanly’s uncle, Lord Overdale.”

The letter fell from Lady Ramsay's hand. "Good Heavens!" she exclaimed. "How extraordinary! But she does not know Lord Overdale; how could she get at him?—he, the most impracticable of human beings! He has never once written to his nephew since that unfortunate Heidelberg affair. I have tried, over and over again, to soften him; I have written and spoken, assumed all sorts of opinions; I have had recourse to every kind of flattery; I never took so much pains to please anybody before, and never was so unsuccessful. He answers my letters certainly, but with cold sarcasm, which would be offensive, if it were not couched in language of the most extraordinary politeness. In short, I confess, I do not know what to make of him. He completely baffles me."

"Isabella, it seems, has succeeded better; probably, because she took less pains."

"But how did she get acquainted with him? Did she meet him? did she write to him?"

Frank pointed to Isabella's letter, which still lay on the floor, at Lady Ramsay's feet. "That would have given you the information,

about which you are so curious. Isabella met Lord Overdale, by accident, at Rome, where, if you remember, he went soon after his wife's death. There he made her acquaintance. Her appearance, I suppose, impressed him favourably; she does not say so, but the invitation to Overdale looks like it."

"To Overdale! Isabella invited to Overdale! Why, he lives in one corner of the hideous, overgrown, old Scotch castle, and never sees a soul! I know it from the best authority—and Isabella invited!—it is the most extraordinary thing I ever heard of!" Then, after a pause, she added: "Isabella is a fortunate woman, to succeed in everything she wishes."

"I cannot quite agree to *that*. She has suffered more than most people; but I hope she will now meet with the happiness which she so well deserves." He sighed as he spoke; and a shade of sadness overspread his features.

Lady Ramsay did not perceive it. She was too full of her own thoughts, and went on, speaking with great eagerness: "But if she is going to Overdale, why on earth does she

come to London ? It would be much better to travel straight through. The London hotels are expensive. I suppose she will be accompanied by her mother and sister ; they will be half ruined. What do they mean by such folly ? Where will they stay ?”

“ With you, Fanny.”

“ With me ! My dear Frank, how you talk ! You must know, that is impossible. She cannot expect it. Have you forgotten how we parted ?”

“ It is precisely on that account that I wish you to invite her now. Isabella has written to you often, and as kindly as if no misunderstanding had taken place. She has forgotten the past ; why should you remember it ? She has met you more than half-way ; will you refuse to do the rest, and be altogether reconciled ? You will not, I am sure you will not.”

“ No, no, Frank ; I cannot so easily forget. Indeed, I cannot.”

“ Just consider how much better it will be, even in a worldly point of view, as well as in every other, that you appear well together. You cannot be ignorant of the unpleasant reports to which Isabella’s sudden departure

from your house, gave rise. These will be entirely contradicted by her returning to it. Charles will be grateful for your generosity. Sir James will be glad to see his favourite Isabella—you know that he will be *much* pleased; and you, Fanny, will be most pleased of all, for you will be pleased with yourself.”

Lady Ramsay’s colour went and came; she looked uneasy, and undecided. Frank proceeded :

“Think over what I have said, and you will acknowledge that I am right. I will leave you now, and return——”

“To dinner—oh, pray do. We are becoming strangers to each other. Now that you are a great man, one can never get hold of you. You are always so occupied—so full of business.”

“Will you promise to consider of what I have said, and not to check the generous impulses, which I see are at this moment rising in your heart, and which are natural to you?”

“What a horrid tyrant you are!” she said, half smiling; but a tear gathered in her eye.

“That’s my good, generous Fanny! How

little the world knows you! I know you better! Is it not so?" He looked affectionately at her as he spoke. "Good-by for the present. We will meet at dinner!" He went towards the door.

"I am so glad you will come—meanwhile—but I won't promise—mind, Frank, I make no promises."

"I am quite satisfied!" he said, with an affectionate glance, as he left the room.

As soon as the door was shut behind Frank, Lady Ramsay rose quickly, went to her writing-table, and put paper before her. But just as she was beginning to write, a sudden thought seemed to strike her, and she stopped, musing. "That *she* should be successful when I have failed!" thus ran the current of her ideas—"that *she* should be more influential than I!" Lady Ramsay threw aside her pen. "Influential, too, in the quarter which will benefit *him*—she will reconcile him with his uncle—she has the game in her own hands now!" Lady Ramsay pushed away the paper, and rose from the table. "No, I cannot invite her here. I cannot witness their meeting. After all, she is not house-

less. Let her go, at once, to Overdale, to the great man, with whom she is all-powerful. Charles may follow at his leisure; but that will be immediately; he, too, may travel straight through London; no, no, that will never do." She sat down again, leant her head upon her hands, and fell into a reverie. "Frank will be so disappointed if I do not write that letter; he thinks too well of me poor fellow, but I cannot bear to disappoint him. Sir James too will be glad to see his favourite; the more so now, that his health is better; and as for Charles, poor boy! how surprised he will be at my inviting her, after all that passed. In his letters to me he never mentions her; he thinks me resentful; he shall find his mistake—he shall see, that I too can be generous, and forgive; that all I wish for is his happiness, even though it be not obtained through my means—she may be superior to me in many things, but not in affection for him." She replaced the paper before her, took her pen, and wrote from the beginning to the end of the sheet, without pause or hesitation.

Frank came to dinner. One glance at his

sister showed that all was right. She took her letter from her pocket, and gave it him. "That's my own sister!" he said, as he returned it to her. "It is like yourself—just what I expected of you."

The little dinner-party was cheerful. Not the less so from the absence of Mrs. Tyrrell and Arethusa; those ladies, on matrimonial thoughts intent, were gone to dine elsewhere.

Aurora was in tremendous spirits. She talked so loud, and laughed so hoarsely, as to elicit more than one exclamation of impatience from Sir James. His former torpor had greatly diminished since his illness, and consequently, his nerves were more sensitive than they used to be. Whereas before he hardly noticed Aurora's loud bursts, they now annoyed, and even irritated him.

"Sir James!" began Lady Ramsay, as they sat round the fire after dinner, "what do you think is in this letter?" She took it out of her pocket as she spoke, and held it up before him.

"Your mesmerising powers are great, but not sufficient to enable me to read a folded letter," was his reply.

“ Then I suppose I must tell you, for you will never guess. I have written an invitation, without consulting you. I have asked three ladies to come and stay with us in London. Your favourite, Isabella Romaine ; with her mother and sister.”

“ Always right, pretty Fanny !” he answered, looking affectionately at her ; “ always kind !”

“ And Sir James ! what do you think ? Charles Stanly is coming too, and——”

“ I thought he was far away—in Russia ?”

“ So he is, but it is to meet Isabella that he is coming, on leave ; and who knows, but we may have a wedding before the season is over ?”

Sir James’s countenance suddenly changed ; when Charles Stanly’s name was first mentioned, it expressed a feeling of vague disquietude ; but now, he regarded his wife with unutterable affection. “ I beg your pardon, Fanny !” he began ; then checking himself, he added, “ I mean, for having always forgotten that bracelet you admired ; that sapphire, you know, at Storr and Mortimer’s. Frank, will you be so good, in case I should forget,

as to write immediately and order it. My memory is bad ; I can't trust to it."

" Oh, Sir James, thank you !" exclaimed Lady Ramsay, with emotion.

" Dear !" put in Aurora, " how nice ! I am *so* glad. It is a lovely sapphire, I dare say ; and she did so wish for it, she told me so—and that nice Isabella coming ! how good you are, Sir James, and Mr. Stanly—well to be sure !"

This last ejaculation was accompanied by a stifled sigh. Good little Aurora could not but remember that, once upon a time, Charles Stanly had been the hero of her own day-dreams. In fact, when he left Eastrow, she forthwith took to wearing her hair in braids. She made her school-children sing two extra psalms a day, for a whole week. She gave up gay colours and fancy-work, and bought fifty yards of flannel to make petticoats for the poor ; of which strips were found in every corner of the castle, to the extreme annoyance of the housemaids and groom of the chambers. Indeed, there is no knowing to what inconvenient acts of charity or devotion she might

have been impelled, had she not fortunately recollected that, if Mr. Stanly did not care for her, it was nonsense her caring for him ; that neither her braided hair nor her flannel petticoats had much chance of touching his heart, since he was not there to pity her sorrow or to admire her industry ; thus she arrived at the sage conclusion that there was no use fretting about what could not be helped. This complicated problem having been satisfactorily worked out, she went to the glass, curled her hair, and allowed herself again to indulge in all the delightful intricacies of tangled silk and mercurial balls of worsted.

As these reminiscences tumbled over one another in the good little soul's mind, causing therein disastrous collisions and confusions, she felt herself getting redder and redder, nor was her perplexity diminished by observing that Lady Ramsay's eyes were meaningly fixed upon her. She was now scarlet to the very verge of apoplexy ; so, by way of an ingenious diversion, she suddenly ejaculated, "Dear !" and followed it up with "Well, a wedding is so nice, after all."

“And Sir James shall dance at yours,” said Lady Ramsay, laughing. “Frank, don’t you agree with me?”

“I think everybody ought to rejoice at whatever is calculated to give Miss Foster pleasure.”

“Well done, Frank,” exclaimed Lady Ramsay, with evident satisfaction. “For a steady old lawyer like yourself, I call that quite a flourishing compliment.”

Every day Lady Ramsay had more and more reason to congratulate herself that she had followed her brother’s advice, and invited Isabella to Belgrave-square. Frank showed how well pleased he was with her, by giving her more of his company than he had done for a long time; and there was no one whose approbation she so much valued. An intimacy revived between the brother and sister, such as had not existed for the last three years. Hardly a day passed without Frank’s spending some part of it with her.

In due time, Lady Ramsay received from Isabella a grateful acceptance of her invitation. It would be no less agreeable than convenient, she said, to spend a little time in London,

before proceeding to Overdale. Madame Rodostomus had not quite recovered from the effects of a severe illness ; and rest after a long journey would be necessary before she undertook another. Lord Overdale, too, on her mother's account, did not wish them to go north till the summer had quite set in. She ended her letter with an encomium upon his thoughtful kindness.

It must be owned that the letter caused a slight pang to Lady Ramsay. How had Isabella managed to captivate this impracticable old man ? But she discarded the feeling of envy which was rising within her. She determined not only to seem, but to be generous. Both Frank and Charles should acknowledge that even their paragon, Isabella, could not surpass her in this respect.

Notwithstanding these noble resolves, Lady Ramsay was not sorry to think that Charles would arrive in London several days before Isabella. She had set her heart upon some good long chats with her boy while his attention was all her own. Great, therefore, was her disappointment and annoyance when she, one morning, received a letter from him,

telling her that his departure from St. Petersburg was inevitably and indefinitely postponed. Important diplomatic business had been entrusted to him, which would admit of no delay. He expressed himself much disappointed, but said that he could not refuse to undertake it, for the business, if well done, would reflect credit upon him, and might lead to future advancement.

The tone of his letter was playfully gallant and easy. Such, indeed, was the usual style of his epistles to Lady Ramsay. Ever since Charles's absence from England, letters had flown back and forward with every post, displaying much ingenuity and wit, and affording equal amusement to writer and reader.

CHAPTER III.

THE appointed day arrived, and with it Madame Rodostomus, Isabella, and Chloe. Lady Ramsay was at first a good deal flurried at seeing Isabella, and at a loss how to behave. But Isabella, without seeming to perceive Lady Ramsay's embarrassment, went up to her, and affectionately embraced her. It was a kiss of peace and of reconciliation; Lady Ramsay felt that it was so, and was grateful to Isabella for the kindness and delicacy, which put her entirely at her ease.

Time had not diminished the old lady's garrulity, nor had illness altered the chirupy cheerfulness of her lamentations. She had not yet been able to unravel the mysteries of Providence above, nor to account for her own extraordinary ill-luck upon the earth beneath.

“ Bless me !” were the first words she uttered on entering the room, “ who would have thought it ? But here we certainly are, all safe in Lady Ramsay’s house in Belgrave-square, which considering—not that I mean to reflect upon anybody, for as I always said, by-gones should be by-gones—still it is altogether very extraordinary.”

Lady Ramsay, thinking this dangerous ground, inquired, by way of diversion, how she felt after her journey.

“ Feel ! I can hardly feel whether I’m alive or dead. Other people may think as they please, I don’t contradict them, but all I say is, a journey is a tremendous undertaking for three lone women, and one of them a widow. I just ask you, Lady Ramsay, what reason there is why we might not have been all robbed, or murdered, or laid up in some cut-throat hole, without a doctor or a nurse, or even a grave to lie in after we were dead, which is so shocking to think of ; and it is a wicked thing to tempt Providence, especially for a woman in my health, dieted upon port wine and prussic acid.”

“ Prussic acid !” interrupted Lady Ramsay.

“ Yes, for my eyes, a lotion—prussic acid in it enough to poison a whole regiment—nearly lost them altogether—and if there was a thing I was proud of, it was my eyes. It may be absurd, I don’t say it isn’t, but I do not wish to be blind, and to lose everything in the world I ever cared for.”

The old lady put her hands to her eyes, as if to ascertain that they were still in their places, while Lady Ramsay sweetly smiled and condoled.

“ And Isabella’s nearly dead nursing me ; just see how pale and ill she looks ; and she’s grown thinner too ; and if she would only complain, one wouldn’t mind it so much, but to see her look ill and sad, and say nothing, is sometimes more than I can bear. Lady Ramsay, I’m a mother !”

Lady Ramsay, though she had never doubted the fact, thought it civil to appear much gratified by the information.

Sir James now came forward, and was complimented on all sides on his improved looks.

“ It’s all Fanny, all Fanny,” he said, looking affectionately at her. Then turning to Isabella, he added : “ And are you as kind

and patient as ever?—always thinking of others and guessing their wishes? But, thank God, I am not quite so troublesome to my friends as I used to be.” He drew Isabella aside, and told her of Lady Ramsay’s kindness and attention to him.

Madame Rodostomus having fidgeted about the room, and taken a rapid survey of everything in it, returned to the sofa, and popped down upon it; then suddenly starting up again, she went off with undiminished volubility :

“These soft cushions remind me of Mrs. Tyrrell; pray how is she?—and Mr. Tyrrell, and Miss Tyrrell—not married yet, eh? I always told Mr. Tyrrell how it would be—that my children would be married first; there’s Isabella come to England on purpose; and as for Chloe, it is her own fault if she has not been married over and over again. Come, Chloe, my dear, and show yourself; she is worth looking at, I can tell you.”

Madame Rodostomus forcibly pulled off her young daughter’s bonnet and cloak, and displayed a beautiful face, and a form, fairy-like, but perfect in its exquisite moulding.

“As pretty as ever,” said Lady Ramsay,

embracing her ; “ and she will, I hope, be my little pet still.”

“ Now, my dear Lady Ramsay !” put in the old lady, before Chloe could make any reply, “ I just want to beg one thing of you ; you really must not spoil my child, and make her vain ; you must not, indeed—which, if she is not, is more than any miracle any saint ever performed ; for the conquests she had made, to be sure ! and the way she treats her admirers ! it makes my blood run cold to think of it ; I tell her it is very wrong, and I hope you will do the same,” she added, winking knowingly at Lady Ramsay.

“ And it is very wrong to tell tales, mamma,” said Chloe, laughing.

“ Tales ! my dear ! If I were to tell the heads you’ve turned, and the hearts you’ve broken, and all about the twelve Roman princes you appointed to meet you, tête-à-tête, at the Colosseum, by moonlight, and there pounced upon them, all at once, frightening them out of their wits, and singing the air of ‘ Lucrezia Borgia,’ which meant that you were going to poison them all, every one !—— but don’t be alarmed—I won’t say

a word about it; the fact is, I'm ashamed of it myself—quite.”

“Then why do you repeat it, mamma?” said Chloe, with a graceful *espiéglerie*, marvelously fascinating.

“My dear, it was so droll!—hi, hi, hi—never was anything so funny. And the day when you and a whole party of your adorers scoured the Campagna, and you dropped your glove, or whip, or something every minute, and made old Overdale get off his horse to pick them up!—hi, hi, hi!”

“Lord Overdale! I am very curious about Lord Overdale,” said Lady Ramsay. “How did you make his acquaintance?”

“You must let *me* tell that story,” said Isabella, turning to Lady Ramsay. “It is very characteristic of my little Chloe.”

“No, no, sister; you shan't tell *that*. It is a foolish story!” And Chloe, playfully, put her hand before Isabella's mouth.

“Lady Ramsay shall judge,” replied Isabella. “You must know, Lady Ramsay, that one day, late last autumn, Chloe and I were walking on the Monte Pincio. We stood still, for a few moments, to admire the glorious

sunset, when a very remarkable-looking man passed by us. He was dark, and high-featured, with shaggy eyebrows, and the most piercing eyes I ever saw."

"Lord Overdale, of course," interrupted Lady Ramsay.

"It was ; but we did not know him then. We saw he was a stranger, and were speculating as to whether he was an Englishman or not, when we observed a little German girl run after him with brooms to sell. The child followed him pertinaciously, and was, it must be confessed, very teasing. For some time, he took no notice of her whatever. She continued following him, and putting her brooms almost in his face, until he, losing all patience, with one stroke, pushed her violently aside, and jerked the brooms out of her hand. They fell scattered about upon the road. The poor child stood, for a moment, quite bewildered, and then burst into tears. Suddenly Chloe——"

"No, no, no," interrupted Chloe. "That is quite enough, Isabella. Don't go on. Please don't."

"Please do," said Lady Ramsay, playfully

pulling away the hand which was again raised to stop Isabella's mouth. "Go on, Isabella; I am all curiosity to hear the rest."

"Chloe ran after the mysterious stranger, calling out, '*Vergogna, vergogna*,' in a tone so thrilling, as to make him turn full round, and utter an exclamation of wonder. Chloe, nothing daunted, expostulated against the cruelty of his behaviour, and, in a peremptory manner, desired him to assist her in picking up the brooms, which were still lying strewn upon the ground. To my great surprise, the stranger, having stared at Chloe for a moment, obeyed her. Chloe then pulled a gold bracelet off her wrist——"

"Oh, stop, Isabella! that was too childish."

"Let me finish my story," persisted Isabella. "She put the bracelet into the child's hand, and dried its eyes with her own pocket-handkerchief. Then she comforted and patted the little creature, who stood staring at the bracelet with a puzzled air, and not knowing what to make of the whole adventure. Chloe then pulled me away, and we went home. Next morning, a packet arrived, directed to Chloe. It was a bracelet, ten times the

value of the one she had given to the little German."

"There it is," said Chloe, holding up her wrist to Lady Ramsay, and laughing archly. "I always wear it, for love of the precious donor!"

"And he sent a note with the bracelet," put in Madame Rodostomus, "such a pretty note; much prettier I'm sure than either of my two husbands ever sent me; and asked permission to call and escort us about, and he has been constantly with us ever since. He is in love with one of us, that's clear; but which, I can't exactly pretend to say;"—here the old lady smirked, and drew herself up—"but considering that he is Baron of Overdale, with sixty thousand a year, it is, I must say, exceedingly gratifying."

Mrs. and Miss Tyrrell came that day to dinner; but not Frank. He excused himself on the plea of important business. Lady Ramsay complained bitterly of his absence, said that he would certainly kill himself by such incessant study; and then added, with meaning, that she must put a stop to these

bad practices, and devise some mode of getting him out of them.

Mrs. Tyrrell was as before, refined and languid, and apparently more occupied with her hair and her dress, than with anything else in the world. She became, however, a little animated when Madame Rodostomus began boasting of Chloe's conquests ; especially when that lady looked at Arethusa with eyes, which plainly said, " You've no chance, now she's come."

The comparison was, indeed, not flattering to Arethusa, who had lost her complexion, and become what is inelegantly called scraggy. By way, probably, of making up for these deficiencies, she wore her shoulders barer, and her ringlets longer.

Sir James was unusually well. The pleasure at seeing his favourite Isabella, acted like a charm upon him. He joined in the general conversation ; but after a time he took a seat beside Isabella, who, as usual, listened with kind interest to all his little stories. When Lady Ramsay looked at her husband's happy face, she was more than ever rejoiced that she had followed her brother's good advice.

It was late before Madame Rodostomus could be got to bed. She had worked herself up into a state of such excitement, that she had no inclination for sleep. Various extraordinary accidents happened while she was undressing, for which she vainly endeavoured to account. First, her nightcap was marvellously missing, and then one of her slippers inexplicably disappeared. And at last, she had to unpack her carpet-bag three times, in order to search for the key of the box in which she kept her prussic acid lotion, and which was at length found in its usual place, attached to a gold chain round her own neck.

When all was quiet in the house, Chloe stole noiselessly into her sister's room. "Not in bed, sister?" she said, caressingly; "I knew you would not sleep without giving Chloe a last kiss. To-morrow I shall make Lady Ramsay give us a room between us. We never were separated before, and I am not comfortable without our little chat, while we are undressing."

"Indeed, I like to have you with me, my own Chloe," said Isabella, fondly returning her caresses.

“ But why do you sit up writing ?” Chloe resumed. “ You will make your eyes dim, and your cheeks pale, and you won’t look pretty when somebody comes, and I choose you to look pretty.”

Isabella smiled sadly. “ I am afraid he will be disappointed in my looks. I believe I am a good deal altered—but no matter—you heard that his arrival is postponed ?”

“ Yes ; at first I was sorry, and then I thought it was, perhaps, just as well ; for we shall have made sure of the old lord by that time.”

“ Oh, Chloe, Chloe ; I do not like the game you are playing there. It is hardly justifiable.”

“ Not justifiable ! I say it is more than justifiable. It will secure your happiness, Isabella. Such a motive would justify almost any means, and those I have employed are most strictly proper and correct. I have told the old fool over and over again, that I am not in love with him, that I never mean to be in love with him, and really, if upon these terms he insists upon making love to me, what can I do ?—how can I help it ?”

“But while you say one thing, you let him infer another.”

“Am I answerable for his inferences? Surely, if a man past sixty, insists upon believing that a girl not sixteen, who tells him that she is not in love with him, *is* in love with him, I really think that it is all fair game.”

Isabella shook her head. “You make a sad fool of him, Chloe. It is not right. I do not like to see you act such a part—even for Charles’s sake,” she added, tremulously.

“Well, you must try to like it, for I’m determined to do it, whether you like it or not. On my own account, I could not resist the fun of coming over this knowing old statesman. Now, put away these letters of Charles Stanly’s, and go to bed, and go to sleep, like a good girl. The idea of sitting up reading such trash as that”—she pointed to the packet in mock scorn—“half filled with stupid old politics. His uncle’s letters are the thing; never were such love-letters, stiff, formal, orthodox, solemn, like their writer. I’ll back them against any other love-letters, past, present, and to come.”

“I am very glad to see Charles so absorbed with what may hereafter be important to him. I do not want him to fancy that he must only write and think about me.”

“Well, there is no accounting for tastes. If you are satisfied, it is all right.” She paused for a moment, then, kissing her sister, “Good night, good night,” she said, hurriedly; “kind, good, unselfish Isabella, good night.”

The door was hardly closed, when Chloe gently opened it again. “I wish I were as good as you, sister,” she said, with one of those sudden changes of tone and manner so peculiar to herself, and so strangely captivating. The features, a moment before, full of mockery and malice, now assumed a serious and tender cast, and her eyes filled as she took Isabella’s hand, and repeated, like a soft echo, “I wish I were as good as you !”

Isabella seized this opportunity, as propitious for pointing out some of the evils of that coquetry to which Chloe so wantonly yielded. She hoped that, in her present frame of mind, she might listen to her admonitions, and profit by them. Isabella spoke kindly, but very earnestly. She described a coquette as heartless,

indelicate, false ; one who delights in inflicting pain and in witnessing torture, in order to minister to a paltry and contemptible vanity. She contended that, however high might originally be the mental or intellectual endowments, they must soon be destroyed by yielding to a propensity so debasing. “It has been said,” she concluded, “that whatever we persist in seeming, we end by being. I know you are not the vain, thoughtless creature you appear, but indeed, indeed, my Chloe, you will, at length, become so. One thing only can save you from this most fatal moral degradation. I mean, a real and deep attachment. Then, and only then, the apparent levity I so much deplore will disappear, the gold will be separated from the dross, and your real nature will show itself in its true colours.”

“It may be so,” replied Chloe, musingly ; “and yet I doubt it. I do not understand your feelings, Isabella. Perhaps I do not understand my own. But I don’t believe I am capable of what you call a real and deep attachment.” She paused and looked fixedly at her sister ; then the melancholy which had overshadowed her features passed away like

a cloud before the summer sun, and she again brightened into smiles. "What's the use of wondering and wishing?" she exclaimed, gaily. "We can't alter our nature; mine is to love you, and to make fools of all the men that come within my reach. *C'est plus fort que moi.*"

With these words, she darted out of the room, to prevent any further observations or admonitions.

Isabella looked after her sister, with a sigh. "Poor child!" she said to herself; "poor little Chloe. What will be your future fate? Nothing can depress that extraordinary elasticity, but it may be crushed. She may die, but she will never learn to endure—endure!"

The word recalled the endurance she herself had undergone during the last four years. She went back to her first meeting with Charles. She recapitulated every circumstance of their early intimacy. She wondered at the sudden growth of those strange feelings, at their overwhelming strength. She almost trembled before the mysterious power, which had so long held her bound; which had controlled her words, her thoughts, her actions;

forcing all into one direction, collecting all into one centre. In her mind there had been no variation, no divergence ; her whole being had, as it were, condensed itself into one focus—one luminous point, clear, bright, intense. It seemed a miracle. But Isabella felt that, where there is no miracle, there is no love.

Long after Chloe left her, Isabella sat up, pondering over these things. Charles's delay pained her. But she would not listen to the rising doubt in her heart. She forced herself to believe that his detention was not merely expedient, but inevitable. For the first time, she tried to blind herself with regard to Charles's faults ; she obliged herself to dwell only upon his good qualities, and upon his love for her.

With a softened heart, she turned again to Charles's letter. She read it once more, determined to find in it a sufficient excuse for the delay it announced. She strove to give a forced significance to each word, to invest the sentences with tender meaning. But in vain. She read nothing but well-chosen expressions, and nicely-turned phrases. It was an amiable, and even a kind letter, but it had

none of that fond incoherence, none of those contradictory outpourings, none of that meaning vagueness—in short, none of those touches which do not paint, but reveal.

She folded the paper with a sigh, and put it in her desk. The key stuck in the lock, and in disengaging it, her ring got entangled in its wards. Having thus only the use of one hand, she had some difficulty in loosing the ring. At last, something suddenly gave way. The key was free, but her ring lay broken on the ground. A chill came over her. It was as if her heart ceased beating. Then she laughed at her folly. “Can a bit of gold influence my fate! Can the twisting of a wire foretel the future! How can I be so weak—so impious!” She picked up the broken ring, and gazed at it till it seemed to tell a long tale, of the past, and of the future. Then, provoked at herself, she folded it quickly up in paper, and put it away; but she could not overcome her sad forebodings. They haunted her perpetually. There are moments in which the merest trifle becomes a dire presentiment.

It was not for two days after Isabella’s

arrival, that Frank called in Belgrave-square. Then, he paid a short, and unsatisfactory visit. His excuse was a sudden accumulation of business, which was too important to be neglected. Isabella had looked eagerly forward to this meeting with her old friend; but her pleasure at seeing him was chilled by the reserve, almost the coldness, of his manner. This reflected itself upon her, and she also felt constrained, and ill at ease with him. In his letters he had been cordial, and confidential; but now, instead of the long intimate conversations she had anticipated, they spoke little to each other, and only upon indifferent subjects. This estrangement was a painful disappointment to Isabella. She had not expected it, for she had thought of Frank only as her old playfellow, her kind monitor, her companion, her friend. It seemed as if she had a natural claim upon his affection, as if he belonged to her, and she to him. This conviction had flowed in upon her with life, and could only ebb with it. Even now, through his altered manner, she felt that his affection was intrinsically the same, it was the one thing on earth which could not pass

away ; nothing could shake it, nothing could replace it. It was a birthright of love, in the noblest of human hearts. It was her own. No power could wrest it from her.

So many things were known to those two, and to those two alone. So many little incidents of childhood, trifling—yet which had been to them important—so many little hopes, and fears, and joys, had been shared together. He knew the father, whom she had loved so dearly ; he knew what she had felt at his death, what she had suffered at her mother's marriage ; he knew all the serious, as well as all the trivial circumstances of her life ; and he knew them as no other could ever know them, for he had seen, and felt them. Whence came it, that the past, in which he held so prominent a part, now rose up so fresh in Isabella's memory ? Much that was important, acquired additional importance ; much that was insignificant, gained weight and meaning. She had never felt such a longing to speak confidentially to Frank ; formerly the confidence was spontaneous, but now that she desired it, her mouth was sealed. She felt afraid, actually afraid of him.

For his sake, Isabella tried to improve in intimacy with the sister, whom she knew he loved. But it was in vain that she sought to like Lady Ramsay. The latter had, as she was quite aware, many estimable qualities, and Isabella tried to believe that these more than outweighed her faults. But her faults were precisely those most repugnant to Isabella. Do what she would, she could not reconcile herself to Lady Ramsay's restless, and as it seemed to her, aimless activity. There was in Lady Ramsay, a love of intrigue, for intrigue's sake, a certain indelicacy of mind, and more than all, a levity of character, which revolted Isabella to a degree which she could not conquer. She was very angry with herself for being so fastidious, she chid herself as intolerant and ungrateful; but it was of no avail; every attempt at confidential intimacy, only served to prove still more clearly, their utter want of sympathy.

Lady Ramsay, on her part, was more than ever provoked, at what seemed to her, the cold formality of Isabella's manner. Isabella's repose and calmness, perhaps from having been long unaccustomed to these peculiarities,

now appeared affected. Lady Ramsay, with her usual hastiness of decision, ascribed this equanimity to indifferences, and she wondered and lamented that Charles should have thrown away his affection upon one, whom she not unreluctantly concluded, was incapable of returning it. She could not resist the pleasure of giving Frank the benefit of her views on the subject, but he answered in such a way, as gave her no encouragement to repeat them.

She consoled herself, however, with the conviction, that, if Frank would not, by words, acknowledge his concurrence with her opinions, he did so more satisfactorily, by deeds. Since Isabella's arrival, he was rarely seen at his sister's. When he came, his visits were short, his manner absent, and his conversation seldom addressed to Isabella. Was not this behaviour, so different to what it used to be, a convincing proof that Lady Ramsay was right in her estimate of Isabella's character? Lady Ramsay, at least, chose to have no doubts upon the subject.

And triumphantly she imparted this discovery to Aurora, who, good little soul, could

not help internally chuckling at a confirmation of certain feelings of her own, but which she had been too good-natured to express. Aurora, as it may have been observed, overflowed with sympathy for everybody and everything, but, truth to tell, with it was mixed no inconsiderable alloy of curiosity. One of Aurora's greatest pleasures was to hear and to tell secrets; and, labour as she might, Isabella would give her no opportunity of doing either. This was not using her well, especially as she had volunteered sundry interesting and very confidential disclosures, and for which she naturally expected a return. Nay, though on one occasion, she bounced into Isabella's room, big with the portentous information that she had got a new pair of stays which made her waist six inches smaller; and though on another she sidled through the half-opened door to whisper the grand news, that Mr. Smith was really to be rector of Eastrow, and actually coming to London to speak to Lady Ramsay on the subject; Isabella did not show any great surprise or delight at either of these remarkable communications. In fact, she only smiled with unpardonable indifference, and said, "I am very

glad you are pleased ;” just as if such things happened every day, and were hardly worth mentioning. What could Aurora do more ? There was no getting intimate with Isabella ! So it was not surprising that the said Aurora, though half angry with herself all the time, concurred vigorously in Lady Ramsay’s opinion of Isabella ; but, then relenting, ventured to pity Miss Romaine for being so absent and so reserved ; “ because, if she won’t attend to what one says, there is no use telling her anything, you know.”

If, however, Lady Ramsay and Isabella made little progress towards intimacy, Chloe and she soon became great friends. Her pert drollery, which had amused Lady Ramsay so much in her when a child, had now grown into a naive and fascinating *espièglerie*. Her love of fun, and thorough enjoyment of life delighted Lady Ramsay, who made a greater pet of her than ever, and indulged, or rather encouraged her in all her whims and caprices.

Lady Ramsay’s curiosity was greatly excited with regard to Lord Overdale. She was never tired of questioning Chloe on the subject ;

nor did Chloe object to be questioned, though it cannot be said that her answers were very satisfactory. But Chloe, in her love of mischief, delighted in mystifying Lady Ramsay, in baffling her penetration, and sending her on a wrong scent. It must be, however, owned, that she herself knew little of the old peer's opinions or his intentions. That he admired Chloe, and liked her society, was plain to everybody, but even she was ignorant with regard to his ultimate purpose. He had told her that he should meet her in London, and he was now expected every day.

Lady Ramsay only waited his arrival in order to give a ball; on which occasion Chloe was to be introduced into London society. Lady Ramsay was charmed with the idea of producing a new beauty, and she saw that Chloe had but to appear, to be at once established as such.

Lord Overdale arrived, and cards were issued forthwith. All London was invited; that is to say, everybody that everybody knew.

If Chloe was pleased at the prospect of the ball, Aurora was out of her wits with joy. The activity was stupendous. The number of

shops she visited, and the quantity of invitations she wrote, exceeds all calculation. She tumbled up and down stairs in a disastrous manner, doing no end of damage to her own dress, and to Lady Ramsay's furniture. Her last exploit was setting fire to the muslin curtains in the drawing-room, in her struggles between the candle and a note, which in her hurry, she strove to read without her glass, and which, catching fire, set the curtains all in a blaze.

The flames were extinguished, and the note deciphered. It was from her friend Mr. Smith, announcing his arrival in London, and mildly insinuating his desire to be invited to the approaching ball.

This request was immediately granted; but to every similar application, Lady Ramsay remained inexorable. The number of unknown dear friends, who suddenly discovered some reason why they *ought* to call or write to her, might seem remarkable to one less practised in the ways of fashionable society in London, and elsewhere. Lady Ramsay, however, was no novice. She wrote and said the sweetest, civilest things imaginable, but she would not extend her invitations. She had no idea of spoiling her party by injudicious good nature.

CHAPTER IV.

THE important evening arrived. Lady Ramsay's handsome rooms were thrown open, and disposed to the best advantage. The lighting was perfect. It had been her especial care to avoid the possibility of a shadow. A profusion of choice flowers adorned the hall and staircase. These Sir James had selected, and he had taken great pleasure in superintending their arrangement.

By ten o'clock all was ready. Mrs. Tyrrell, in pink and silver, was sunk upon a sofa. Madame Rodostomus, very bolt upright, chirped away beside her. Arethusa, all flowers and ringlets, stood admiring herself at a glass. Aurora, with her hair curled so as to bid defiance to the most orthodox coachman's wig on record, and in a toilette

such as to shame any rainbow, was nearly choked with fuss and flurry. She gasped with amazement at Lady Ramsay's coolness, which she considered as a proof of very extraordinary self-control; but she was somewhat disappointed at the style of her dress. Though handsome, it was hardly, in Aurora's opinion, fine enough for the occasion; but when she saw the sisters in simple white, she could no longer conceal her vexation and dismay.

"Dear!" she exclaimed, bouncing up to Lady Ramsay, "isn't it a pity their dresses being so *very* plain? Couldn't they put on a pink sash, or something showy in their hair? Shall I go and see if I can find among my things something smart, just to set them off a little?"

Lady Ramsay, however, was of a different opinion, so poor little Aurora was fain to check her kindly feelings.

"I wonder who will arrive first!" said Arethusa, who had satisfactorily completed her survey of herself at the mirror.

"I know," said Chloe, gaily.

"No!" exclaimed Aurora. "Now, do you really? How can you? Who do you mean?"

“ I know whom she means,” said Lady Ramsay ; “ but I’ve a notion that she is mistaken.”

“ Oh, pray tell me,” pleaded Aurora. “ Now do. I should so like to know.”

“ Chloe flatters herself that Lord Overdale will be the first to lay his homage at her feet.”

“ Dear ! You don’t say so ! Lord Overdale ! how nice ! But who is he ? Is he young and handsome ?”

“ Better than all that,” said Lady Ramsay, smiling. “ But you must surely have heard of Lord Overdale, Charles Stanly’s uncle ?”

“ But he must be quite an old man,” said Aurora, with an air of grievous disappointment. “ There’s no use being admired by an old man, you know.”

“ No use !” exclaimed Arethusa. “ He has sixty thousand a year, that’s all !”

“ I wonder if he will marry again,” simpered Mrs. Tyrrell, looking admiringly at her showy daughter.

“ Old men do marry sometimes to be sure,” observed Aurora, reflectively ; “ that is, when they can get anybody to have them.”

“ You surely do not suppose that with sixty thousand a year he might not get anybody he pleases !” said Arethusa.

“ And I’m sure he’d make *such* a husband !” said Madame Rodostomus.

“ Sixty thousand a year unencumbered,” put in Arethusa, with emphasis.

“ A beautiful place on the borders of Scotland,” said Mrs. Tyrrell.

“ And a peer to boot,” laughed Lady Ramsay. “ Who could help falling in love with such a combination of invaluable qualities ?”

“ Well, I’m sure I don’t know,” said Aurora, who seemed to be weighing the matter very seriously. “ It’s all very nice, certainly ; but I don’t quite see what it has to do with falling in love,” she added, dubiously.

“ Love ! Nonsense ! Nobody falls in love now. None but common people do it,” said Mrs. Tyrrell, as if she had quite settled the question.

“ Dear ! do you think so ? You don’t mean *really*.” Aurora looked dreadfully perplexed.

“ At all events, to marry for love is not to be hoped for. Alas !” said Arethusa, with a deep sigh, “ too, too often, it becomes a sacred

duty to sacrifice one's affections on the altar of necessity."

"Well, but really—duty and affection do go together, sometimes. Dear!——" was Aurora's final ejaculation, as a tremendous knock at the door shook the house.

The name of Lord Overdale was now heard ascending from mouth to mouth, up the stairs. In another instant, that important personage entered the room.

"Was I right?" whispered Chloe to Lady Ramsay, as she flitted past her.

Lord Overdale could not be called a handsome man, but there was, in his appearance and bearing, something so striking, that once seen, he could never be forgotten. The stamp of a master-mind was undeniably upon him. His person was large, and perhaps somewhat clumsy, but his movements were exceedingly graceful. His hands and feet were small, and thorough-bred. His head was finely formed, and his brow massy, and intellectual. His features were no doubt irregular, but his eyes, large, dark, and piercing, would have redeemed any features. His address was courteous, but very stately; his voice deep and sonorous.

He paid his compliments to Lady Ramsay with extreme urbanity, but at the same time, with a certain coldness. Then, after having spoken to each of the other persons present, he sat down beside Chloe.

He showed no desire to conceal the marked attention he was paying her. But though his admiration was evident, his manner was so quiet and so dignified, that not the slightest shadow of ridicule could be cast upon what in almost any other man of his years would have seemed absurd or revolting. No doubt Chloe laughed at him behind his back; but in his presence, neither she, or anybody else, would venture to do so.

As the company began to arrive, Lord Overdale left Chloe's side, and mixed with the crowd. He knew everybody in the room; everybody at least, in any way distinguished for rank or talent; and everybody, however distinguished, was proud to be noticed by Lord Overdale.

Chloe's beauty produced an effect even surpassing Lady Ramsay's expectations. Chloe possessed that undefinable something so far beyond mere beauty, and which can best be

expressed by the word charm. The extreme simplicity of her dress, her foreign air and manner, and especially the singular mixture of artlessness and coquetry which she exhibited, rendered her indescribably fascinating. What in any other girl would have seemed unbecoming or forced, was in her, graceful and attractive. Though overflowing with fun and spirits, she had nothing of the hoyden; her vivacity was all childlike and feminine.

She soon became the centre of universal attraction; all the men in the room asked to be introduced to her; she smiled graciously upon them, and encouraged their attentions with, it must be owned, a great deal of coquetry. The more Lord Overdale watched her, the more pleasure she seemed to take in exciting admiration; but every now and then, as if fearful of going too far, she would run up to him and whisper a few words in his ear, which always produced the effect she wanted, and converted his annoyance into entertainment.

Frank did not arrive till late. He looked thoughtful and careworn. As soon as Lady Ramsay perceived her brother, she flew to-

wards him, took possession of his arm, and insisted upon his walking through the rooms with her. She was delighted to find that he was satisfied with her arrangements, and told him that she valued his approval more than that of any other person. Then she resumed her seat beside Lord Derwent, who, starred and gartered, was the lion of the room.

Isabella, from the first, declined dancing. There was something in this gay ball which saddened her. These festivities accorded so ill with the tone of her mind. Her spirits sunk; she could not rally them.

Before Frank's arrival especially, she felt at her heart a dead and heavy weight. Her eye wandered vacantly round the room; so many people, and not one who really cared for her! not one to whose happiness her presence was necessary. No heart that beat responsive to hers; no eyes that watched her, none that she might watch, and from their happiness distil her own! In that moving mass of human beings, there was not one who regarded her with that interest which is more than a friend's; who, in the whole assembled crowd, saw her, and her only. He

who should have done so was far, far away. Why was he not there? Yet, if he had been there, what then?

But she dared not let her thoughts run further. She strove to silence the voice in her heart, which again, despite herself, would make itself heard, and this time more loudly. He might have been there if he had chosen it; what we will, we always can do. “Yet, after all,” she said to herself, “I may wrong him; there may be impediments — impossibilities. I will believe that there are. I must, and will believe it.”

She partly succeeded in arresting this dangerous train of thought; but she could not dispel the gloom which sat more and more heavily upon her. In the multitude she felt isolated and alone; joyless in the universal gaiety.

Yet there was one human being to whom she might give pleasure. She chid the selfishness which had caused her to forget poor Sir James. He had done his best to welcome his company, bowing to each new arrival, and repeating, “I am happy to see you,” till he was confused and weary. He was now stand-

ing alone and neglected, in a corner. Isabella immediately went to him, and talked to him about the people he knew, and the things in which he took interest.

Presently Frank came in. Isabella saw him glance towards her, but he kept at a distance, and avoided her eye. It was in vain that she beckoned to him; he either did not, or would not, see her.

At last, he suddenly came across the room, to that part of it where she was sitting beside Sir James, and with an abstracted air began talking of common-place topics. It was very painful to Isabella to discuss trivialities, while her mind, and, as she well knew, Frank's also, was engrossed by very different subjects. Still, she could not overcome the restraint which Frank's presence now imposed upon her, and her conversation was as little akin to her thoughts as his own.

They talked of the ball, and of the taste which Lady Ramsay had displayed in the arrangement of her rooms. "Fanny is in her element," he said, with a melancholy smile, "and happy in it. According to Horace Walpole, the world is a comedy to him who

thinks, and a tragedy to him who feels." Here Frank stifled a sigh; then, with a forced laugh, intended to cover it, he added: "What is it, think you, to those that do neither? A puppet-show, I suppose. And how many there are who neither think nor feel, but are mere puppets staring at fellow-puppets! Would to God——" He walked abruptly away without finishing his sentence.

Isabella was preparing to follow, when Aurora, red and panting, bounced up to her. "Dear! I've had *such* a nice waltz! I'm so hot, and so tired! but dancing does tire one. I wonder you are not dancing, Miss Romaine! A ball certainly is the most delightful thing in the world! Shall I introduce you to my partner? *Such* a delightful waltzer! They say he does not always go *quite* in time, but I'm sure I think he gets on very well indeed, and people do sometimes go out of time, and I can't get you another, because he is the only one I know, and anything is better than not dancing at all, though, to be sure, everybody would be happy to dance with you, and——"

At last Aurora's breath altogether failed

her, and she stopped, gasping. Isabella was therefore able to explain that, strange as it might seem to Aurora, she actually preferred not dancing.

“Dear ! but what is the use of a ball except to dance? and if you would just try my partner, I’m sure you would like him. It’s Mr. Smith, you know,” she added, very confidentially, as her voice sunk into a whisper; “and really once dancing with him is as good as a dozen times with anybody else; for he goes so fast, and it is so delightfully fatiguing, that one feels as if one had danced twice the quantity, you know.”

But even this charming prospect did not tempt Isabella. She declined the introduction, and leaving Aurora to wonder at her stupidity, and to expatiate, for Sir James’s benefit, upon the merits of her delightfully fatiguing partner, she went across the room and joined Frank.

“You seem no better amused than I am,” she began, with a forced attempt at cheerfulness. “Yet it is not long ago that we both liked dancing.”

“I am out of place at a ball,” he said,

gloomily. "I have no longer any object in general society, and I never could comprehend how any reasonable being can take pleasure in company, merely for company's sake. For those who wish to make conquests, to cultivate a flirtation, or to carry out an intrigue, political or otherwise, there is some meaning in balls and parties ; but they must either be very unhappy, or very inane, who hurry from place to place, without aim, and without satisfaction. He who can go out without feeling or giving pleasure, must be very silly, very contemptible."

"Yes, that is it," replied Isabella, half-speaking to herself. "Without feeling or giving pleasure." He had uttered her unspoken thoughts.

He looked fixedly at her, as a deeper shade clouded his features. He saw that she was thinking of Charles Stanly ; had *he* been present, Isabella would have enjoyed the present scene of festivity ; she would at least have enjoyed his enjoyment of it. Frank could not help being thankful that Charles was not there ; he felt as if to see him at that moment, would be more than he could patiently endure.

“Am I really so much altered?” Isabella proceeded in the same dreamy voice, and in a manner which showed that her thoughts were wandering far away.

“Altered!” he exclaimed, in a strange, hard tone.

It recalled her to herself, and resuming her forced cheerfulness, she said, “Who knows but it may be the bad compliment, that I have just had paid me, which makes me feel dull, and out of sorts. Would you believe that Mr. Preston, whom I have not seen since I left Eastrow, passed me just now, without recognising me. It was not till I spoke to him, that he knew me by my voice. Am I then so *very* much altered?”

“I don’t know,” Frank replied, as his countenance softened, yet saddened in its expression. “I cannot tell you. In my eyes you are, and always will be, the same. Indeed, to me, it seems——” He stopped short, turned abruptly away, and hurried out of the room.

Madame Rodostomus, meanwhile, had fastened herself upon Lord Overdale, and was

chattering on with her usual perspicuity and conciseness.

Lord Overdale sat as if he had been in the House of Lords, listening with apparent unction to the old lady's oration ; but in fact, occupied with other, and very different thoughts.

" She certainly is a beauty, is my Chloe ! " The name aroused Lord Overdale's attention, and he bowed acquiescence. " And though it may be absurd, I really can't help it, I do like to be the mother of a beauty. Don't you, Lord Overdale ? Well, I thought you would agree with me ; and then her eyes ! nobody else in this room has any eyes to speak of—and though I say it, who shouldn't say it, they certainly are exactly like mine, all but the size, and the colour, and perhaps the expression. Rodostomus, poor dear ! used to say they were very like his, and I always said they were like mine, and many a quarrel we've had about them ; when I say quarrel, I mean discussion, for never was anything like the harmony in which we lived, and poor dear Romaine too, and whatever other people may think, they never shall persuade me, that it is

right for married people to quarrel, which I always told both my poor, dear, departed husbands, but they would not be guided by me, and certainly, though I never could account for it, I believe there never was a woman so tormented as I have been in this world, or any other.”

She paused. Lord Overdale finding that some answer was expected of him, although utterly unconscious upon what subject, gave one of those signs which may be interpreted in any way, according to the pleasure of the auditor.

“ I knew you would agree with me,” she proceeded, having laid in a fresh supply of breath, “ that certainly the ways of Providence are most unaccountable, else—I only ask the simple question—yet I should just like to know why it is, that I, and nobody else, should have such things happen to me! Nobody else loses everything they ever cared for, husbands, and eyes, and all. The idea of going blind is not pleasant, I can tell you—nor being poisoned either, for that matter, and that’s just my alternative—for I declare I tremble every time I do but look at my

prussic acid lotion—and am always in terror lest I should put it to my nose or mouth by mistake, and fall down stone dead instantaneously; and there might be nobody in the room to fetch a doctor, or to run for a clergyman, or—anything.”

At this period of the harangue, Chloe, having just finished a dance, bounded across the room to speak to Lord Overdale. She gave him a very droll account of her last partner, whose mawkish compliments she mimicked with exquisite drollery.

All this time, the old lady had continued holding forth with herself, in the same interesting strain, on the subject of her eyes, and just as Chloe had finished her story, she wound up thus: “Though I say it, who shouldn’t say it, they certainly are fine eyes; don’t you think so, Lord Overdale?”

“Eyes!” said Lord Overdale, who at that moment was looking at Chloe’s, and thought her mother’s observation referred to them—“the most beautiful that ever were seen in a human head.”

“Bless me! Chloe, my dear, did you hear that? I don’t think either of my husbands

ever said anything half so pretty to me, even before we were married.”

Chloe flew round to her mother, and whispered in the ear furthest from Lord Overdale, “ I really believe he is in love with you, mamma.” And she darted off to conceal the laughter she could no longer restrain.

“ Well, of all the unaccountable things I ever met with, this beats all of them put together. Really, Lord Overdale,” she added, turning towards the latter, “ I am very much gratified and flattered, very much, indeed, I’m sure !”

But Lord Overdale had been bored beyond his powers of endurance. Rising, therefore, he made the old lady a very profound bow and a flourishing speech, which meant nothing, but it was quite sufficient to enchant her.

She ran off to Isabella. “ My dearest child,” she said, “ I’ve found it out at last. I know which of us he is in love with—just the one that you would never have imagined. I’m sure I had rather it had been either of the others, but I can’t help it, so I must

make the best of it. I really begin to think that everything is for the best."

Isabella looked perplexed. "I can't tell you anything more now, my dear; he'll expect me to return to him; but you shall hear all about it to-morrow. I must follow him directly; I'm afraid he's annoyed at my leaving him."

And the widow made way through the crowd in pursuit of Lord Overdale, who was evidently beating a retreat. "My dear Lord Overdale," she began, "I always think it best to avoid any possibility of misunderstanding; there is nothing like clearness both in thinking and speaking, and therefore I think it best, as a matron, and a mother, and a widow, to tell you at once, and in as few words as possible, that my affections are buried." Notwithstanding the clearness of which she boasted, the widow paused for a moment to consider with which husband her affections might be supposed to be interred, or whether it would have a better effect to say that they were equally divided between each. Before she had made up her mind upon the

subject, Chloe had taken possession of Lord Overdale's arm. "You must not go yet," she said, caressingly; "I have a hundred things to tell you. I am not going to dance any more. There's not one of my partners fit to take me down to supper, not one fit to laugh with, and I'm tired of laughing *at* them. You will stay and take me to supper, will you not? Oh, I am sure you will."

Chloe knew her power over Lord Overdale. She knew how to assume a look and a manner, which never had been resisted, nor was it now.

During the whole of supper she exclusively engrossed his attention. She exerted her utmost powers of entertainment; she was everything by turns—sprightly, serious, witty, gentle, sarcastic, and feeling. All these phases succeeded each other, half naturally, half artificially.

With the insight, or perhaps the instinct of coquetry, Chloe seized Lord Overdale's weak points, and turned them to her advantage. The art she displayed, or rather, perhaps, the nature, was marvellous.

Lord Overdale was the last in the room.

Chloe had attracted him into the boudoir, in order to secure her prize. At last she rose, and began singing with exquisite pathos, while a humorous smile played upon her lips, “*Ecco quel fiero intante, Nice mia Nice, addio ! Come vivrò ben mio, così lontan da te !*”

She then made a profound obeisance, and was about to leave the room, when Lord Overdale, seizing her hand, stopped her. He slowly raised it to his lips, looking at her in an inquiring manner, as if to ask permission for the liberty he was going to take. “Don’t be so long about it !” she exclaimed ; “I’ve had my hand kissed before now, and I don’t mind it at all.”

Lord Overdale dropped the hand, hurried past her, and left the room.

CHAPTER V.

NEXT morning, before either of the sisters were awake, Madame Rodostomus, half dressed, bolted into their room.

“Isabella !” she exclaimed, hovering like a nightmare over her daughter’s bed ; “ my dear, how can you sleep so long, and such extraordinary things going to happen ? One really would think sometimes that you have no feeling at all. Now pray, my dear, attend to me. I want to ask your advice.”

Isabella looked inquiringly at her mother. The old lady went to the dressing-table, took up a comb, and began arranging her silvery locks ; then staring hard at herself in the glass, and with her back turned towards Isabella, she suddenly exclaimed, “ Do you think there

is any particular harm in marrying three times?"

"Dear mamma!" exclaimed Isabella, in great astonishment, "what can you mean?"

A prolonged peal of laughter issued from Chloe's bed.

"Oh, laugh away as much as you please; but it's quite true; I thought it last night, and am quite sure of it this morning. Not that I should ever have suspected it, if you had not put it into my head; but you certainly see things in a way that nobody else does; and though I'm very sorry it has happened, still, as it can't be helped, I must just make the best of it, and it is only right to submit to the will of Providence."

"A most praiseworthy and meritorious resolution," said Chloe, with meek gravity.

"What does all this mean?" said Isabella. "I am utterly abroad."

"My dear, one would really think sometimes that you were stupid, and blind, and deaf into the bargain. Really, for so clever as you are, it is quite unaccountable to me, I must say, quite. Didn't you see how it was last night with Lord Overdale? I never

should have thought it myself, at my age ; but I certainly look young. I'm sure I can't help it, nor he neither. I begin to think that marrying keeps a woman young ; so of course, the oftener they marry the younger they look ; and certainly, rank and fortune are not to be despised. It's not so much for myself that I care for these things, as for your sakes, my dears ; for you are both orphans and daughters, and not sons, and——but how it happened that you didn't find it out, Isabella, does, I must say, quite pass my comprehension."

"Dear mamma," said Isabella, "I hope you do not imagine—I hope you do not really fancy——"

"Really fancy," interrupted the old lady, "what nonsense you do talk ! How can a thing be real, and fancy at the same time ? There is no use talking, or arguing, or discussing, or anything, with people who can't express themselves distinctly—who can't even speak English !" And the widow, in a rage, flounced out of the room.

"Oh, Chloe, Chloe !" said Isabella, anxiously, "what has poor mamma got into her head ? What does all this mean ?"

But Chloe could not speak for laughing. One fit of merriment succeeded the other. It was some time before she could explain the old lady's delusion with regard to Lord Overdale.

At last, she was able to begin her story from the beginning; and she related, with great fun and humour, the scene that had taken place between Lord Overdale and her mother. She mimicked to the life, the old peer's solemn bewilderment, and his studiously polite answers, made at random, to Madame Rodostomus's interminable and incomprehensible discourse. Isabella could not help being half amused, still she could not approve of her sister's conduct. It has already been seen, how careful she was of censuring too much or too often, and how she occasionally let things pass which she was far from approving, in order that her remonstrances might have more weight, on those occasions when her sister's conduct was most seriously reprehensible. Isabella especially avoided whatever might repel Chloe's confidence, or lessen her affection. She knew that Chloe had never yet had a secret from her, and that encouraging her to tell

her follies openly, was the most salutary check she could hold upon them. Chloe owned them, indeed, with a childlike naïveté, which rendered them excusable, if not actually amiable.

Isabella was really amused at her sister's account of her conversations with her various partners; she shook her head a little when she heard of the game she had been playing with Lord Overdale; but when Chloe told her that it was she put it into her mother's head that Lord Overdale wished to be Madame Rodostomus's third husband, Isabella could no longer resist exclaiming, "Oh, fie, fie; oh, that was wrong! Oh, Chloe, it was very wrong indeed!"

"Wrong? No, indeed, it was right; just serves that foolish old man right for thinking that I am going to fall in love with him. I only hope she'll worry him as he deserves, that's all."

"And your mother, Chloe! You do not consider that, from mere wanton love of amusement, you have placed your mother in a ridiculous situation. That can never be right; and I fear some evil will come of it."

"No evil at all, but a great deal of good.

If mamma thinks that she is going to be Lady Overdale, she won't bother me to marry him, which, otherwise, I saw she was going to do; and I shall have time to get all I want out of the old gentleman without compromising myself too far. To manage him is no easy matter, I can tell you, for he is hard to deal with, and turns restive each time I bring his nephew upon the *tapis*."

"Even for Charles Stanly's sake," said Isabella, earnestly, "I cannot approve of such unblushing deceit."

"Deceit! There is no deceit at all. It's all fair, and above board. I told him from the first, and I told him again last night, that I shall not, and will not, and cannot, fall in love with him—that I am neither amorous, nor matrimonial; and that if he won't believe me, he's a fool, and must take the consequences. I tell you it is all fair. It's a drawn game between us. And as for not being amused at seeing the suspicious old diplomatist believe all I tell him, or rather all I do *not* tell him—*c'est plus fort que moi*, and that's the truth."

But Isabella still looked grave, and shook her head. At last, Chloe went up to her, in

her caressing manner, and throwing her arms about her sister's neck, said : " Dear Isabella ! now be the good, kind Isabella who has so much patience with the naughty Chloe. Now you *shall* smile," she said, fondly stroking her cheek, " and I'll tell you my plan. It is all for you, dear sister. What I want, is to prevent Lord Overdale from becoming too matrimonial. I mean just to keep him in play, till I get him to promise something good for Charles Stanly, and then I've done with him, poor dear old man ; I'm getting heartily tired of him already."

The colour rose in Isabella's cheek. She could not but see, that the only chance of reconciling Charles with his impracticable uncle was through Chloe's intercession. But could even this end redeem such means ? If she alone had been concerned, she would have said, clearly not. But it was for *him*. Still she doubted whether she was justified in countenancing such a step, notwithstanding its infinite benefit to Charles. She tried to persuade herself, that the near relationship between Charles and Lord Overdale did, in some

measure, lessen what she could not help seeing, was great impropriety on Chloe's part.

While she was hesitating with respect to what answer she should make to her sister, Chloe went on in her coaxing tone: "If you will be good, and quiet, and let me take my own way just for this once, you shall see that all will go right. I must keep Lord Overdale in good humour, that he may not alter his intention of having us at Overdale. Now, I shall accept, only upon condition, that he will invite Charles to join us there, and if at the end of a fortnight, after we get into his house, everything is not comfortably settled, my name is not Chloe, that's all."

"My pretty Chloe," said Isabella, kissing her, "I know you mean well, but indeed——"

"No buts—no buts." And Chloe was going on half laughing, half coaxing, half persuading, when she was interrupted by Lady Ramsay's entrance.

Lady Ramsay was in high spirits. She was delighted at the success of her ball. She took great credit to herself for the way in which she had managed her invitations; she

had had *everybody*, and yet no crowd. She told amusing anecdotes of her skilful tact and diplomacy, which were duly appreciated by Chloe.

Dresses and manners were discussed. Lady Ramsay and Chloe vied with each other in the number and drollery of their anecdotes. Nobody was spared. But in their mode of narration there was one great difference. Chloe said more than she meant; Lady Ramsay meant more than she said. Both had an equally keen perception of the ludicrous. Isabella, on the contrary, was not apt to see things in an absurd point of view. She took little amusement in the foibles and follies of her fellow-creatures.

After talking over general matters, Lady Ramsay came to particulars. Several flirtations were noticed; among the rest, Lady Ramsay observed, that Arethusa had made a decided conquest. "Lord John is evidently struck with her," she said. "I am glad of it. He would not be exactly a good match for my sister, he is not rich; but he is well connected—and I wish she were married. She is losing her good looks, poor thing."

“ People do sometimes lose their beauty, and one seldom looks as well when one is old, as when one is young.” Chloe had imitated Aurora’s voice and manner so exactly, that Lady Ramsay actually turned, to see if she was not in the room.

“ Oh, you naughty Chloe !” exclaimed Lady Ramsay. “ But moderate your satire, for I should not be surprised if Aurora were married before any of you.”

“ To the delightfully fatiguing partner, whom she was bothering Isabella to dance with ?”

“ No, Miss Chloe ; a very different person.”

“ Well ! if Aurora makes *une grande passion*, *je ne m’en mêle plus*.”

“ She will make something better than *une grande passion* ; she will make an excellent wife.”

“ If you can find her a husband ; two must play at that game.”

“ *Le mari est tout trouvé*.”

“ I am all impatience to hear the name of so intrepid a gentleman.”

“ Really, Chloe, it is very wrong of you to make me laugh at my own friend. But my

plan is a very serious one. I think my brother likes Aurora Foster."

This time, Isabella's exclamation of wonder was louder than Chloe's.

"I do not say that Frank is in love with her," proceeded Lady Ramsay, "but he appreciates her estimable qualities. I have often heard him praise her kindness and unselfishness. I think he might be very happy with her."

"Do you really think so!" involuntarily escaped Isabella.

"Yes, I do. Frank ought to marry. He wants a companion. Neither Arethusa, nor my mother, can be called companions for him. He lives too much alone, and over-works himself, to a degree, that will make him ill, sooner or later. In fact, his intense study begins already to tell upon his constitution. I am uneasy about Frank."

"Not seriously, I hope?" said Isabella, with great anxiety.

"He looks ill, and is grown morose and taciturn—he, whose good humour and cheerful spirits were never wont to flag. He is altogether different to what he used to be,

and he refuses to give me any explanation as to the cause of so great a change."

Isabella looked sorrowful, but made no observation.

"Now, if I could only get him to marry," proceeded Lady Ramsay, brightening, as she unfolded her plan, "he would have an object in life. Somebody to exert for, and somebody to exert for him. Aurora is a pleasant companion; she would make his home cheerful and comfortable. Besides, she has plenty of money; so that Frank might provide for my mother and sister, without working so tremendously hard, as he now does. That, you know, is his object. Aurora is not pretty, but she is good and kind, simple and natural."

"Yes," interrupted Chloe, "nearly a natural, and not quite a simpleton."

"No; there you wrong her. She is a sensible girl, and a true friend."

"Yes, indeed she is," said Isabella. "Still, Lady Ramsay, I doubt if she is the person to suit your brother. I mean, I doubt if he will think so. Do not be too sanguine."

"She will ruin him in furniture," said Chloe. "I should like to know how much of

yours she has demolished since she came to London?"

Lady Ramsay raised her finger reprovingly to Chloe, who, laughing, escaped from the room. Lady Ramsay was going to follow, when Isabella detained her.

"I think you had better sound Mr. Tyrrell, before you drop any hint on the subject to Miss Foster. Excuse my volunteering advice, but I have a strong impression, that Mr. Tyrrell will not agree to your plan."

Lady Ramsay slightly raised her eyebrows, while the corners of her mouth curved downwards. She was annoyed at this interference; the more so, as an inward conviction told her, that Isabella was right. Determined, however, not to give up her scheme, she would not listen to any further arguments against it, and therefore left the room, saying, in no suave tone of voice: "We shall see—we shall see which of us knows my brother best."

Isabella's opposition only increased Lady Ramsay's eagerness to carry through her plan; and she was determined not to lose one moment in setting about it.

Accordingly, she sent a note to Frank, say-

ing, that she would call upon him in the course of the afternoon; but too impatient to keep quiet till that time, she went in search of Aurora.

Aurora was sitting in close conference with her dearest Arethusa, who had just dropped in, to talk over the events of the ball.

“Well! young ladies!” began Lady Ramsay, “so you are discussing partners and conquests, I suppose. Which of you had most?”

Arethusa, indignant at the comparison, tossed her ringlets contemptuously.

“Dear!” said little Aurora, “how can you ask such a question? And I’m sure I never saw Arethusa look so well, as she did last night; people do look better sometimes than they do at others, you know, and I’m sure everybody thought so — one gentleman in particular.”

“I have not the remotest suspicion to whom you are alluding. I danced with so many. It was not only confusing, but bewildering.” Arethusa tried to look at once innocent and dignified.

“If I were to tell you what Mr. Preston said of you, how you would blush, Arethusa.”

“Mr. Preston!” exclaimed Arethusa, indignantly; “what do I care for Mr. Preston!”

“Oh, I thought——” said poor little Aurora, crestfallen. “One may *think*, you know. I’m sure you and he were talking a long time together in the doorway. And you told me just now——”

“I beg you will not think anything of the sort. You have no business to think. But I see how it is. It is that mischievous Chloe, has been putting all sorts of nonsense into your head. What should you think, Fanny, of her wanting to persuade Aurora, that Lord Overdale is in love with her? When I came in, I found her telling her so. There never will be any peace in this house, as long as Chloe remains in it.”

“Oh, never mind Chloe,” said Lady Ramsay, laughing. “She does sometimes carry her jokes too far. Did she say nothing about Lord John? Arethusa, just step into my boudoir; I want to speak to you.”

Arethusa, trying hard to blush, left the room. Lady Ramsay was about to follow, when Aurora detained her.

“I assure you, Lady Ramsay, pretty Chloe

meant no harm. It was only a joke, and people may joke, you know—only it made Arethusa angry ; but I'm sure, I never thought about it for a moment—about Lord Overdale, I mean. It's not at all likely his falling in love with me, especially as he never once spoke to me—besides, people do not fall in love with me, you know," she added, with a humble little sigh.

"Never be downcast about that," said Lady Ramsay, looking affectionately at the good-humoured ugly face. "A real attachment is worth all the fallings in love, such as Arethusa thinks so much of."

"Yes, to be sure, a real attachment !" said Aurora, thoughtfully ; "but I don't think anybody ever will have a real attachment for me. I only had one partner last night—not but that he was as good as a great many—he is such a nice young man ; he danced yesterday, for the last time—almost—the new rector, you know."

"Never mind the new rector. It is not of him that I am speaking."

"Dear ! but are you really speaking of anybody in particular ?" Aurora turned scarlet.

“ I cannot tell you yet. It might be premature.”

Aurora jerked herself forward to the extreme edge of her chair. “ Now, dear Lady Ramsay,” she said very hoarsely, “ I should *so* like to know—for I really think—and strange things do happen sometimes.”

“ Can you not form the least guess ? Can’t you think of anybody, who admires you ?”

“ Admires ! oh, Lady Ramsay ! Well, to be sure !” Aurora flushed prospectively and retrospectively. She thought of her several past matrimonial illusions. She ran over the names of all the gentlemen she knew, who were at all likely to be the heroes of future ones ; but she could, at the moment, hit upon none but the before-mentioned, delightfully-fatiguing partner. She did not like to name him again, so she drew herself bolt upright, and said valiantly, “ Nobody admires me,” as if she didn’t mind it at all.

“ Don’t be too sure of that, my little Aurora,” said Lady Ramsay, kindly. “ I could tell of a gentleman—but I won’t—I will be discreet.”

“ Now, Lady Ramsay, you really must,”

said Aurora, seizing hold of both Lady Ramsay's hands, and looking, wistfully, up in her face. "I do so want to know."

"Did it never occur to you that my brother regarded you with no unfavourable eye?"

"Dear!" was impetuously projected. "No, certainly not; yet, now I come to think of it, I really don't know; and Mr. Tyrrell is to be sure the most delightful person I ever met with. He did not ask me to dance, but then he never dances. He did not speak much to me, but then he hardly spoke to anybody. Well, I'm sure I don't know what to think. But he certainly is the most perfect character I ever knew, and——"

"Stop, my dear Aurora," said Lady Ramsay, at last with difficulty interrupting the flow of words which Aurora, in her excitement, was pouring forth—"do not let your imagination run too fast. I have not yet spoken to my brother upon the subject. I meant to have sounded him first; but somehow, you got my secret out of me. I think you are just made for each other. However, as I do not know Frank's opinion—though I think I guess it—you had better moderate your en-

thusiasm for him, lest you should be disappointed."

"Oh, no," said little Aurora, very humbly. "Don't be afraid of me. I'm never sure of anything till it happens. So many things I have expected have never happened at all, that I'm quite accustomed to it. I'm quite used to be disappointed."

Lady Ramsay was punctual to her appointment with her brother. She found him in his study, surrounded by books and papers, all in scrupulous order, and handy for use.

"What a horrid old bachelor you are," began Lady Ramsay, looking round. "Such prim precision was never seen before. I can't allow this state of things to go on any longer."

"My study is not calculated for receiving ladies, I confess; but, as it is not my intention to admit any——"

"But it is my intention that you shall."

"Indeed! Perhaps you intend to convert it into a ball-room. Was that the important subject for which you sought an interview?"

"Not exactly. But I have something important to speak to you about."

“ I am all impatience to hear it.”

“ Now, do be serious, Frank, and listen to me. I have not been comfortable about you, of late. You have not looked well. You work too hard, Frank.”

“ I work no harder than you do. Business is my pleasure, and pleasure is your business ; that is all the difference.”

“ Your pleasure does not agree with you as well as mine does ; and if you go on overworking yourself as you now do, you will lose both your good looks, and your agreeable manners. In fact, my dear Frank, you are getting serious and old, and I expect that you will be cross in time ; and I will not acknowledge a cross old bachelor for my brother ; I positively will not.”

“ Necessity has no law, Fanny. I am not yet rich enough to settle down into *otium cum dignitate*.”

“ Is it wise to kill yourself first, in order to enjoy afterwards ? If money is your object, speak one word, and you may get plenty.”

“ And pray what may that magical word be ?”

“ A rich wife.”

“ Oh, Fanny !”

“ Now, pray, just hear me out without interruption, and you shall have all the conversation to yourself afterwards. I know a girl who is the very person for you. She will make you the happiest man alive. She is good, amiable, sensible; not pretty, certainly——”

“ In plain English, a fright.”

“ No, indeed, by no means; and a man soon gets accustomed to his wife’s beauty.”

“ But never to her ugliness.”

“ Good Heavens, Frank, how severe you are! I had no idea you cared so much for beauty; and, really, there are other considerations more important.”

“ A position not to be denied.”

“ Such a sweet, dear girl—and riches are not to be despised. And Aurora Foster——”

“ Come, Fanny, enough of this. The best joke may be carried too far.”

“ I am not joking. The affair is quite serious. And what is more, I have a notion, that poor little Aurora is seriously attached to you.”

“ Fanny,” he said, very gravely, “if you have been so injudicious as to put any such

nonsense into her head, I must beg you to dismiss it as soon as possible."

"But, my dear Frank——"

"I should have supposed that you, of all people in the world, were least likely to advise an uncongenial marriage."

A sigh escaped from Lady Ramsay; but presently forcing a smile, she said,

"After all, I do not know that my life has been less happy than that of most married people."

"That is encouragement for me, certainly."

"We never get all we want in this world. You are not in love with anybody else, and as you never were what is called a lady's man, I really think——"

"Pray allow me to think for myself, and to judge for myself. I know my own requisites for happiness. I am not blest with a pliable disposition, which can accommodate itself to circumstances. I am not a favourite with the world, and I am indifferent to the world's favour. I must be happy in my own way, or not at all. I sometimes wish—but this is folly"—he checked himself, as if afraid of saying too much. He dropped the musing

tone in which the last sentences had been spoken, and said with great decision of manner —“Once more, Fanny, I beg you will never again revert to this subject. We will drop it, if you please, for the present, and for the future.”

He spoke in a manner that convinced Lady Ramsay that her suit was hopeless. She took leave of her brother, and went away sorrowful and disappointed.

Frank sat for some moments in a thoughtful attitude. Then, mournfully shaking his head, he said half aloud, “And yet, I do not wish it; I do not wish to be satisfied with mediocrity. I have placed my ideal high—too high perhaps—but I will have that, or no other.” He rose slowly, unlocked his desk, and touched a secret spring. A drawer flew open. From this drawer he took a miniature, and gazed upon it long and fervently. Then a sigh of relief escaped him. “No, Isabella, I will never be unworthy of you. The niche filled by the statue, shall never be occupied by a block.”

CHAPTER VI.

It is a just observation, that when we have nothing to do, we are apt to do something which had better have been left undone. Aimless activity has been the ruin of many a man, and many a woman also. Lady Ramsay was one of these, who could not be still. She was always plotting and planning. Generally, it must be owned, her schemes were successful, and sometimes they were advantageous to the persons concerned in them. When they failed, her disappointment was, naturally, in proportion to the rarity of such an event.

Her matrimonial projects, on behalf of her brother, were entirely at an end. She lamented the failure, and reproached her own precipitancy, as being, in a great measure, the

cause of it. Had she but waited, things might, perhaps, have adjusted themselves according to her wishes ; that is, she would have given a push here, and a shove there, and all might have gone right. Now, there was no hope left. She had overshot her mark, she had betrayed her drift. Her brother would, henceforward, be on his guard, not only against Aurora's charms, but against those of any other young lady whom Lady Ramsay might choose to take under her protection.

Then she had to break the news to good little Aurora. This was the worst part of the business. After much deliberation with regard to how the melancholy intelligence should be conveyed, Lady Ramsay thought that the mode least distressing to Aurora's feelings, would be to observe simply, and as if by chance, that Frank was a confirmed old bachelor, who thought of nothing but his prosy law-books, and that she did not believe he cared even for her now. Poor little Aurora grunted, and turned scarlet, symptoms which Lady Ramsay well understood, and which were confirmed, by her appearing next morning with her hair in very untidy braids,

to say nothing of her actually and positively refusing to go to a party in the evening.

But Aurora saw that Lady Ramsay was vexed at her annoyance. She also considered it a duty to bear up against the trials with which it pleased God to visit her. She loved to do her duty, and she hated that anybody, Lady Ramsay especially, should be vexed on her account. Moreover, staying at home was dull, braids were unbecoming, and Mr. Smith still in London; so, altogether, she satisfied herself that it was right to curl her hair, and go to parties again. This sublime effort of virtue met with its just reward. She encountered Mr. Smith at the very first party she went to, danced with him three times, and found him more delightfully fatiguing than ever.

We have heard that fools are taught by experience, but we have never found it so. On the contrary, we believe that the wisest only, profit by its lessons. Lady Ramsay was not one of these. Indeed, the failure of one plan, only rendered her more eager in pursuit of another. If she could not marry

her brother, there was no reason why she should not succeed in favour of her sister.

Lord John decidedly admired Arethusa; accordingly, Lady Ramsay did all in her power to throw these two together. She sent to Paris for a whole *trousseau* of elegant and expensive articles of dress for her sister. She made Arethusa sit to Mr. Preston for her picture. The picture, when finished, was to occupy a conspicuous place in the Exhibition, and to gain celebrity for the original. It was impossible that Lord John, who was remarkable for vanity, but not for wisdom, should withstand so many and such well-directed attacks. So, at least, thought Lady Ramsay, and so thought her fair sister. Lady Ramsay made every possible advance to Lord John, nor was Arethusa behind hand—quite the contrary.

Lord John was their constant attendant at balls, parties, and pic-nics. Fortunately, Sir James was pretty well, so that Lady Ramsay might conscientiously leave him, especially as the business on hand was what she considered of infinite importance. Either Aurora or Isabella stayed at home with him, usually the

latter. Isabella had never cared much for general society, and now less than ever. She was, indeed, not well; she had, in fact, never recovered from the fatigue of nursing her mother during her tedious illness. Her strength, which, at the time, had kept up wonderfully, was now beginning to flag, and she was languid, and out of spirits. This dejection she endeavoured to ascribe entirely to the state of her health, but she knew in her heart that it proceeded chiefly from a different cause. Endless longing, and hope deferred, made sad havoc with a constitution naturally delicate. These are indeed, directly or indirectly, productive of half the ills which flesh, or rather spirit, is heir to.

Isabella really liked to stay with Sir James; for she saw that her society gave him pleasure, and her pleasure was always in that of others. His old fondness had increased tenfold. He enjoyed, more than ever, the soothing influence of her presence. He hung upon the soft intonations of her voice as upon strains of heavenly music, it made him forget all his ailments.

Little Aurora, whose spirits had once more

risen to their usual boisterous tone, pretended to be very jealous of Isabella. She incessantly irritated Sir James's nerves, by screaming confidentially into his ear, that he was fickle, inconstant, and a gay deceiver. This last epithet struck her as so exceedingly funny, that she could not help telling it, confidentially, of course, to Mr. Smith, and she repeated it to every one of her correspondents.

And numerous, indeed, were these. Aurora was eminently a popular person, and no wonder. She was ugly, common-place, and good-natured; thus she excited no jealousy, and put nobody out of conceit with themselves. She was curious, trustworthy, and perfectly unenvious; she loved to hear her friends' secrets, enjoyed their good fortune, and took almost as much interest in their concerns, as if they had been her own. She delighted in their long letters full of themselves, and answered them in kind. Such a correspondence could not but be agreeable to both parties. Aurora possessed the talent, and no contemptible one, of filling, at one sitting, six sheets of paper, all crossed and recrossed, and all about nothing. It was marvellous to see

with what alacrity she contrived to cover sheet after sheet with trite common-places. She always had plenty to say, and plenty of words to say it in; the only thing wanting was ideas, but one cannot get everything. For our part, we maintain, that to be able to make up a letter when one has nothing to say, is a most valuable gift. It disposes of superfluous time, preserves from *ennui* and ill-humour, and is highly beneficial to the revenue.

Amid balls and parties, and so-called pleasures, the season passed away. The weather was becoming hot, and the atmosphere of London intolerably close. Lord Overdale was impatient to leave it; but he would not go without Chloe. She had not reminded him of the invitation to Overdale, which she had only half accepted in Italy, and he did not yet choose to mention it to her. He would do nothing rashly. He would patiently bide his time.

His visits in Belgrave-square were not very frequent, but they were always well-timed; he generally contrived to get a few minutes' conversation alone with Chloe, and in a few minutes he read more of character than most men do in as many years. He marked with

pleasure that she was becoming very weary of the frivolous dissipation in which she was spending her life ; and he thence inferred that she would soon be as willing to leave London as he was himself.

Till then he would drop no hint on the subject. Lord Overdale, too proud to be vain, never for a moment supposed that Chloe would, according to the common acceptation of the word, fall in love with him ; but he believed that she might desire to become his wife. He knew her to be ambitious, proud, and enthusiastic. Her ambition would be satisfied by his position, her pride gratified by his talents ; his devoted admiration of herself would kindle her enthusiasm. Chloe would, he knew, be miserable with a man of abilities inferior to his own ; she required a husband to whom she might look up, and he felt that she perceived and appreciated his mental and intellectual superiority. Her behaviour to him was quite different to what it was to other men. She, also, encouraged their attentions ; but at the same time she laughed at them unmercifully, and cared very little whether they perceived it or not. Now, in

his presence at least, she never ridiculed Lord Overdale, and her evident desire to please him never flagged. Her love of coquetry disturbed him little; in the first place, he believed that it held her proof against a more tender sentiment; and that Lady Overdale should flirt was an idea which his proud brain could not compass. Her manner and bearing, when once his wife, could have nothing in common with the manner and bearing of Chloe Rodostomus. His wife, like Cæsar's, must be above suspicion.

Was this reasoning sound? Possibly not. But was there ever a man in love who reasoned soundly?

One afternoon, when he called in Belgrave-square, he found Chloe alone, extended listlessly upon the sofa. She rose at his approach, and received him with a smile of pleasure.

He marked the expression of her countenance, and drew from it a favourable omen. "This is an unexpected pleasure," he began. "I hardly hoped to find my bright sunbeam at home, on so fine a day, and alone!"

"I thought that you would come, and I

wished to see you." She spoke in the tone, half playful, half imperious, which had for Lord Overdale such an indescribable charm.

"And pray what may be the purport of your wishes?"

"Oh, you must guess them. If you will, you can."

"You are weary of the life you are now leading, and long for a change."

Chloe clapped her hands approvingly. "So far you are right—go on."

"You are ready to fulfil your promise of paying us a visit at Overdale!"

"Right again. You excel in divination!"

"Your mother has now had rest enough; your sister will throw no obstacles in the way. I do not, therefore, see why we should not leave London in a few days."

"Nor I neither," Chloe said quickly; and then paused, evidently expecting something further from Lord Overdale.

"I may, then, consider the affair as settled."

"Not quite," and a smile of peculiar meaning overspread her features. "I must first speak to Isabella; she may not like to leave London before the arrival of your nephew."

“Inconceivable madness !” ejaculated Lord Overdale. “Unaccountable infatuation !”

“Yes,” she replied, “everybody’s predilections appear madness but our own. Are yours *always* reasonable ?” She looked at him with an arch expression. It plainly said, “Is your predilection for me so very reasonable ?” Then she added aloud, “But you, of course, are superior to infatuations or fascinations. It is natural and just that you should be intolerant to a weakness in which you do not share.”

His eyes expressed admiration sufficient to excuse any amount of weakness. A beam shot from them, which in him was equivalent to a smile. His mouth rarely altered its fixed lines, but he smiled beautifully with his eyes. He paused awhile, and thus spoke :

“Do you really think that your sister’s constancy is not fictitious ? May she not be influenced by overstrained delicacy, by a mistaken sense of honour ? Can she really care for a man, ordinary in every sense of the word ? Nay,” he continued, preventing Chloe’s interruption, “you need say nothing in his favour, I know him well.”

“ I thought you had never seen him !”

“ But I have heard of him. I have heard enough, and more than enough.”

“ So you judge from the reports of others, and not from your own observation. I was mistaken in you.” Her lip curled scornfully.

Lord Overdale’s brow contracted as he said with sternness, “ There are some things I will not bear—even from you.”

“ Will you not ?” she inquired, with a smile of peculiar sweetness, offering a striking contrast to her former brusque, almost sharp tone of voice. “ Will you not ? we shall see.”

“ I do not say that I am altogether impartial. What human being dares make such an assertion ? God knows, I have cause enough to be prejudiced against his father’s son, but let that pass. You may, however, believe me when I tell you, that I have made many inquiries concerning Charles Stanly, and taken undoubted measures for ascertaining the truth of the information I have received. The result is, that my nephew is possessed of no superiority whatever, either of mind or of intellect. For your sister’s sake, I wish it were otherwise.”

“Poor Isabella!” sighed Chloe. “Yet if she fancies herself happy in her choice, she is so.”

“She cannot; she must see her error. Probably she repents of her engagement, and would break it off, if she might do so honourably.”

“Oh, no, no!” exclaimed Chloe, with vehemence. “Isabella will not, cannot, change. Change is not in her. She may see her error, but she will cling to it. She may see his faults, but she will love him the better. How has she not loved Chloe!” The last words were spoken in a feeling whisper.

Lord Overdale, with difficulty, repressed some powerful emotion. Chloe went on with increasing enthusiasm :

“I have tried her affection—tried it again and again—nothing could shake it. So nothing will shake her attachment to him—nothing. He may be unkind, and she will pine and die, but change! never. She will not, cannot, cease to love. It must be a strange, strange feeling, that love of which so much is said and sang—a wonderful feeling—a fearful and a wonderful thing. Thank God, I do not know

it. I believe I cannot—and yet—there are moments when I almost wish——” Chloe paused, and then added, very softly, “to be as she is.”

Lord Overdale gazed intently at her lovely features, reflecting, in turns, every variety of expression, every shade of feeling. He marked the successive emotions as they passed across her mind, like clouds in a summer sky. Now all was gloom, now brilliancy; now these fleeting lights and shades seemed to blend, and tremble into one glorious harmony. Yet over all, lowered the dark thunder-cloud. A strange and ominous expression which, at times, shot from her large pupils, told of a tempestuous future; as the glowing hues of the morning predict the storms of a tropical noon. She looked wonderfully beautiful, as she sat in a drooping and pensive attitude, apparently lost in reverie.

Of a sudden, she looked up, and perceiving his eyes fixed upon her with an admiration almost amounting to awe, she exclaimed, laughing :

“How droll you look ! so very, *very* solemn ! You always look serious enough, but to-day

you surpass yourself. What may be the reason of this stupendous gravity?" And without waiting for an answer, she began singing the quartetto from the "*Barbiere di Siviglia*," where the old guardian is surprised into immovability, at his ward's pranks:

"*Guarda Don Bartolo—Sembra una statua ;
Fiato non restagli—Da respirar——*"

She imitated, with exquisite fun, all the different voices that compose the quartetto; and when she came to the deep bass—" *Ma guarda Don Bartolo*," Lord Overdale's gravity was quite overcome, and he laughed as he had seldom laughed before.

"That's what I wanted—I wanted to make you laugh. Now I am ready to answer some of those weighty questions that you have been pondering in your brain, and which would have crushed me altogether, if they had come upon me with their unmitigated momentum."

"I was only thinking, that your sister must by this time have discovered the real character of the man to whom she so imprudently linked her fate. She must, therefore, repent of her engagement. If so, it

would be folly in her to fulfil it. In such a case, change would not be fickleness ; it would be mere common sense."

Chloe shook her head, but not feelingly, as before. The fit of seriousness was over ; her love of fun had regained its ascendancy.

"What I mean," he proceeded, "is, that if, as you say, your sister is so superior a person—nay, nay, I do not doubt it," he said, amused at the vehemence of Chloe's gesture of protestation against the doubtful "if"—"I do not dispute her superiority, but this conviction increases my wonder at her choice—it excites my pity at her obstinacy. The world in which such things take place, must indeed be a base and contemptible world," he added, with sudden vehemence.

"No, not contemptible, only ridiculous. We are all of us ridiculous enough, you and I not excepted."

The satirical meaning conveyed in her tone would, in any one else, have been offensive. But together with the reckless daring which flashed in her eye as she pronounced the last words, was blended a mystic softness, so strangely fascinating, that it cost Lord Over-

dale no little exertion of self-control not to betray his admiration by some overt act.

He conquered himself, however, and after a short pause, said, in his usual emphatic manner :

“ Perhaps you are right. We are all absurd. But in our very absurdity lies a deep melancholy. Without humour there can be no pathos.”

“ Then I agree with you ; contempt, however, is too grand a word—we poor human beings have no business with it. But abuse the world as you please—it’s all one to me, so as you are indulgent to my sister. For Chloe’s sake, you ought to be kinder to Chloe’s sister.”

“ Should you like me to invite my nephew to meet her at Overdale ?”

“ Promote her happiness, and you may rely upon my——” She paused ; gratitude was a cold expression, yet she did not care to risk any warmer. “ Thank you, Lord Overdale,” she added, half playfully—“ thank you for what you have already done, and thank you still more for what you are going to do.”

The proud curl of her lip showed that she had accomplished her end. Lord Overdale

saw, that instead of the agreeable surprise he had intended to give her, she had been leading him on to the point where she wished to bring him. He saw that her conduct towards himself was, and would be, in proportion to his own towards Isabella. This bantering of favours was not exactly flattering ; still, as it proved her attachment to her sister, it gave him reason to believe that gratitude might engender a similar feeling towards himself. This hope was more than sufficient to make him forgive her the little triumph which she had achieved. Indeed, he liked her the better for it. It increased his opinion of her powers, and by proving her superiority, justified his choice.

Chloe lost no time in announcing Lord Overdale's invitation to her mother, and to Isabella. The old lady considered it tantamount to a distinct proposal of marriage to herself, and Chloe took care to foster the illusion. Madame Rodostomus was so eager to set off, that she could hardly wait for the time appointed. Indeed, she lived in such continual dread of divulging the secret which was to be confided to her, and her terror lest

she should divulge the tender things which had not been said, was so excessive, that she would not trust herself to mention Lord Overdale's name, and she had to put a most inconvenient restraint upon her organs of speech.

Isabella was distressed, and as she herself felt, unreasonably so, at this additional postponement of her meeting with Charles. The delay would be, at most, of a few days, perhaps only of a few hours. Lord Overdale had promised to invite Charles to his house, and he would surely keep his word; still, any delay filled her with a sort of superstitious dread. Chloe told her, and she tried to believe, that of all possible plans, this one was most likely to promote Charles's advantage and her happiness. But reason with herself as she might, she could not dispel a vague feeling that there was something of ill omen in first meeting Charles under the roof of his dreaded uncle. Chloe laughed at her fears, and she joined in the laugh, yet they would haunt her in spite of her better judgment. She saw that the mere fact of Charles being received at Overdale, even if productive of no favourable result to herself, was of great importance

to him. Isabella, therefore, did her best to conquer these gloomy forebodings, and consented, with apparent readiness, to their departure from London.

Lady Ramsay was all dismay when the announcement was made public. It was inexpressibly painful, she said, to part with her dear friends. She protested, that she had become so accustomed to their society, that it seemed quite indispensable to her. She declared that she had hoped to keep them in Belgrave-square as long as she herself remained there. She had quite counted upon their accompanying her to Eastrow, and staying with her at least some weeks. She was terribly disappointed, and, indeed, half inclined to be offended with Lord Overdale for robbing her of them. However, she did not attempt to dispute the point with him. She lamented their departure, but she did not press them to stay.

In fact, she had been secretly taking measures to promote the end which she so eloquently deplored. She had even sought to enlist Frank in her cause. She had told him that, so long as Chloe remained in London,

there was no chance of Arethusa's marrying. Lord John had shown various indications of transferring what, for want of a little word, might be termed his affections from the latter to the former; an affront which Arethusa resented with proper feminine indignation. Frank, however, had been utterly impracticable, and refused to meddle in the business, even for his sister's advantage. Lady Ramsay dared not urge him further. She dared not breathe her real reason. Perhaps, indeed, she was herself unconscious of it.

In the first fervour of generosity, Lady Ramsay had really wished, or really thought she wished, to bring Charles and Isabella together. But the relief she experienced when his journey was postponed partly revealed to her the state of her mind. The fact once admitted, she took no further pains to cheat herself respecting it; and now that the time was come, when Charles might arrive any day, her desire of first getting rid of Isabella, increased to an almost uncontrollable extent. She could not bear the idea of being present at their meeting. That he should follow immediately was natural; she would not

for worlds detain him from Isabella one moment. They might be as happy as they pleased out of her sight; indeed, she was ready to do anything in the world to forward their happiness, but she did not choose to stand by and witness it.

By way, perhaps, of reconciling herself with her conscience, and promoting the welfare of "her boy," or, rather, prompted by her invincible love of managing, Lady Ramsay made a desperate effort to gain Lord Overdale's confidence, and become a mediator between himself and his nephew. She spoke to him of Charles, in every variety of accent; she placed his good qualities in the light she thought most likely to make him view them favourably. She admitted his faults, and even went so far as to exaggerate them, in hopes of a contradiction, or something which she might construe into a contradiction, on his part. She dressed her face in smiles, and she dressed her face in tears. She tried flattery, and she tried brusquerie; she was matronly, and she was maidenly; she was witty, and she was naive; and all in vain. Nothing could melt Lord Overdale's cold courtesy;

nothing could win more from him than a lofty bow, or a polite sentence. She was terribly provoked at having wasted her talents and her time. She could not even get an invitation to Overdale. This she was especially bent upon obtaining; not that she meant then to accept it, but she wished it given, in case she should desire, at any future time, to profit by it. And when, at last, *poussée à bout* (to use her own expression), she said, with well got up timidity, "I've half a mind to run down some day and dine with you, and take you all by surprise!" the only answer vouchsafed was a bend of the head, portentous and solemn. Jupiter's imperial nod was nothing to it.

Lord Overdale did not seek to conceal his dislike of Lady Ramsay. Her character was one which he particularly disliked. Frank's, on the contrary, he admired exceedingly. Once or twice, he had even been on the point of speaking almost confidentially to the latter. But Lord Overdale was of too suspicious a temper to trust anybody entirely; and he almost misdoubted Frank's sincerity from the excess of it. Long ago, he had made up his mind that there was no such thing as a really

honest man. He chose to believe, that human beings can be acted upon by one motive only ; namely, interest, and that those who affect to follow the dictates of other and nobler feelings, are only cleverer rogues, and more consummate hypocrites than the rest. Still, he so far admitted Frank's excellence, as to choose him for his legal adviser. He thought that he should probably have some law business to transact. If he married, he must of course make a settlement upon his wife, and also one upon his nephew. Chloe, he knew, would insist upon it, and Frank's assistance would be requisite, and his opinion might be useful.

The day before Lord Overdale left London, he told Frank, as if by chance, that he might possibly have recourse to his services. He dropped no hint of his intended marriage ; but spoke vaguely of an allowance which he intended to make his nephew. He must first see the young man, he said, and ascertain how far the information he had received respecting him was correct. His present object in speaking to Frank was to request him to inquire which was the best mode of making such a settlement, as should be revocable at

pleasure. Lord Overdale confessed to an utter ignorance of legal minutiae, and legal technicalities. Frank replied, that he was most happy to hear of Lord Overdale's kind intentions towards Charles Stanly. He had known him from a boy, and loved him as a brother. He trusted that Lord Overdale's opinion of him would be as favourable as his own, nor did he, indeed, doubt it. Both in appearance and manners, Charles was remarkably prepossessing, and his talents were of no mean order.

Here Frank paused. He would fain have said more in Charles's praise; but a peculiar expression in Lord Overdale's countenance deterred him. The bitter sneer, which played about those iron lips, said plainly that Frank was only wasting his time, perhaps worse. Even an impartial man, is rarely propitiated towards another, by hearing him praised; but if he be prejudiced against him, praise is indeed fatal.

Lord Overdale saw this perplexity. He saw, that Frank longed to say more in favour of Charles; and he naturally concluded, that he hesitated from inability to praise with

truth. This proof of conscientiousness raised Frank, at the same time that it lowered Charles, in Lord Overdale's esteem. He saw how anxious Frank was on his friend's behalf, and yet how little he could say in his favour. Thus Lord Overdale inferred that Frank's opinion of Charles, agreed with his own; and the discovery of this coincidence, put his lordship in unwonted good humour. He shook hands with Frank on taking leave, and told him almost graciously, that he hoped soon to see him at Overdale.

Next morning, to the universal surprise, Madame Rodostomus was down an hour before the rest, and ready for departure. She was bonneted and shawled, she held an umbrella in one hand, and a pair of spectacles in the other; and what was most remarkable, she had not one vision of any strayed or forgotten articles.

Lady Ramsay had been so completely put out of humour by the failure of her attempt to win Lord Overdale's friendship and confidence, that she could not act with her usual skill. She tried vainly to get up a scene of

sentiment. She could not look sorry at Isabella's departure. She must, indeed, have infallibly betrayed her joy, had it not been for the safety-valve afforded her in snubbing Aurora. This good little soul, much as she had been discomfited by Isabella's discouraging manner, and openly as she had delivered herself upon the subject; now that Isabella was going away, began to feel sad remorse for the opinions she had uttered, and extreme regret that she should have no opportunity of making atonement for them.

"I'm so sorry, Lady Ramsay," she said, in half-choked gutturals — "so very sorry she's going."

"Pray keep your sorrow for a more fitting occasion."

"But I thought you were sorry too. I'm sure you said so."

"*Said!* What does it signify what I said? You talk just like a fool, Aurora."

"Dear! But really, Lady Ramsay!" Then, angry with herself for having spoken so sharply, she added, "I'm very sorry. I beg your pardon, I'm sure."

Tears twinkled in the little grey eyes, and Lady Ramsay, remorseful at having called them forth, kissed the unsuspecting girl's forehead; and somewhat reconciled with herself for having performed this act of good nature, she was able to make Isabella one of her amiable and neatly-turned speeches.

But Isabella was unequal to respond to it, as Lady Ramsay expected. She was unable to control the extreme depression of spirits, which had taken possession of her. To leave London, where she had so fondly, and so fully expected to meet Charles, to think that this meeting, to which she had looked forward for upwards of three long years, was postponed, as it seemed to her gloomy views, indefinitely—to look forward to that meeting under the roof of the man Charles most dreaded, and whom he had most reason to dread—these were prospects, at any time, disheartening enough; but in her present frame of mind, they seemed well-nigh overpowering. In order not to betray her dejection, she was forced to assume a demeanour still more quiet than usual.

This calmness irritated Lady Ramsay almost beyond control. But for Chloe's entrance, she must have expressed her annoyance.

Chloe was in her wildest spirits. She had got everything her own way, and was duly, or unduly, triumphant. She flew up to Lady Ramsay, and by the drollery of her conversation, gave a salutary diversion to her thoughts.

But Sir James saw through Isabella's exaggerated equanimity. With the instinct peculiar to children and invalids, that mysterious power common to the undeveloped as to the decaying mind, and which is often denied to fulness and to maturity, he felt the weight of sorrow at her heart ; he saw the unshed tear ; he heard the unbreathed sigh. As a child weeps at the sight of sorrow it cannot understand, so Sir James sympathised with feelings which he was unable to explain. He even forgot, in her sorrow, his own grief at losing her. He longed to comfort her, but could not think of any cheering words ; so he took her hand, pressed it, and said, " God bless you—God bless you !"

" Here he is ! Chloe ! Isabella ! My dears !

How can you keep Lord Overdale waiting ?” screamed the old lady. Down stairs she darted, and into the barouche she popped, without ever recollecting that she always caught cold in an open carriage.

“I feel as if I should never see her again,” said poor Sir James, as he watched the carriage drive away.

“And no such great loss either,” retorted Lady Ramsay, pettishly. But she spoke low, and he did not hear her words.

The barouche was proceeding towards the northern station, when, in the middle of the most crowded part of the New-road, the old lady started to her feet, and frantically gesticulating, exclaimed in a loud voice, “Lord have mercy upon us !”

“Dear mamma !” said Isabella, vainly endeavouring to coax her into her seat again, “what is the matter ?”

“Matter ? Murder’s the matter ; poison’s the matter ! One would really think, Isabella, that you had no feeling for anybody !”

“Be so good as to sit down, and explain yourself,” said Lord Overdale.

The widow, awed by his authoritative man-

ner, obeyed the first part of Lord Overdale's injunctions, but the second was beyond her power.

“ Oh, Lord Overdale, never was such a thing before ! and to think that I should have done it ; I, who have always been so careful, which certainly is very extraordinary—all my luck ! nobody ever was so unfortunate ; but I must say, I do not like the idea of being hanged, and drawn, and quartered ; it may be absurd, but I really can't help it. I have not the slightest doubt but they are all lying stone dead by this time, and unable to speak or move. I distinctly recollect having left my prussic acid standing by itself in the most conspicuous part of the whole room.”

Isabella understood her mother, notwithstanding her explanation, and asked Lord Overdale to send back for the missing bottle.

He gave the necessary orders to his servant. In a very short space of time, the man returned with a message from Lady Ramsay, that no bottle of any sort or kind had been found in any of the rooms.

At this intelligence, Madame Rodostomus began to laugh hysterically ; then, suddenly

bursting into tears, "Oh, my dear," she said, addressing Isabella, "never forget your mother's last words, the ways of Providence are inscrutable, and if I should live to the age of Methusaleh, I never should alter my mind there. I now clearly remember, that the bottle is in the secret drawer of my dressing-case, which your poor dear departed father gave me just before we were married. Things happen to me that happen to nobody else—I certainly am a most remarkable person."

"Drive on!" said Lord Overdale, in a voice of thunder, which effectually silenced the widow.

Chloe could contain herself no longer. She shrieked with laughter. Hitherto the sinister expression of Lord Overdale's countenance had restrained her merriment within certain limits. She had contented herself with half-whispered commentaries, addressed to Isabella, and aimed at Lord Overdale. At any other moment he would have been amused by them, but he was in no mood to relish epigrams, however pointed. At last, however, he could not repress a smile at Chloe's imitation of her mother's pious ejaculation, "Lord have mercy upon us!" She

followed up her advantage, and before they reached the station, his equanimity was entirely restored.

Misfortunes never happen singly. The express was just off when the party reached the station.

“Stop!” exclaimed Madame Rodostomus, rushing after it—“stop, stop, stop!” and then, by way of enforcing her wishes, and making them more intelligible, she translated her “Stop, stop, stop!” into French, into Italian, and lastly, into Greek.

An universal burst of laughter shook the platform. But Lord Overdale looked round, with gravity so unperturbed, that he at once checked all inclination to merriment; at least, among those within sight of him. He then asked to see the station-master. Immediately, two or three gentlemen in uniform ran in quest of that dignitary. The man in authority appeared, had a few minutes’ conversation with Lord Overdale, and, shortly afterwards, a special train was put on solely for his lordship’s benefit.

Chloe stood by watching these proceedings. Her surprise at the immediate obedience paid

to his wishes, and her approval of his calm, commanding manner, did not escape Lord Overdale. He drew from this observation a favourable augur, and, with unwonted good humour, he offered his arm to the old lady, to hand her into the carriage.

“You are too good,” she said, simpering, “which is more than either of my two other husbands ever were, though, to be sure, I was married then—but, bless me! Lord Overdale, is this the train we are to get into?—cut short—it is not half the usual length. What has become of the rest of it? and I don’t like the appearance of the engine—it has a wicked look. I am sure it will blow up, or do something, before we reach our journey’s end—I know it will—I have no doubt about it. Lord Overdale, I would do anything to please you, except being blown up. Indeed, I cannot get into that carriage, it would be tempting Providence. I really do not like the idea of being blown up, or killed, or suffocated, or that sort of thing. Now, I only ask you, Lord Overdale, do you?”

But the stern expression of his eye, as she looked up into his face, for an answer to her

question, overawed her, and she allowed him to help, or rather to shove her, into the carriage. She could not, however, resist one last look at the wicked engine, nor a parting observation to the station-master, who stood bowing on the platform. “ You will never hear of us more—we shall all be blown up, or something—but it is no fault of yours—I promise not to complain of you—or inform against you—my luck—just my luck !”

CHAPTER VII.

SIR JAMES RAMSAY was inconsolable at Isabella's departure. For some days he wandered uneasily about the house, as if seeking her in every part of it. He could talk of nothing but of Isabella, and of the numerous little proofs of attention and kindness which she had shown him, and which none but himself had appreciated, or even observed.

It is curious that Sir James, and Frank Tyrrell, the weak and the strong mind, alone felt her worth. In the former, it was instinct, in the latter, insight. They knew her; but to the others, she was a stranger. Isabella was too superior to be popular. People know themselves better than they choose to acknowledge, and ordinary minds shun those above them. How should it be otherwise?

We cannot like what we do not understand, and few could understand Isabella. Those who saw the poetry of her character, doubted her good sense; those, who acknowledged her judgment, denied her imagination. It was difficult to comprehend a mind at once so simple and so deep. It was impossible to like a person who was so uncommunicative. Confidence begets confidence, and our friend's egotism induces our own. Therefore we like to hear people talk about themselves; therefore we like to hear them parade their merits and perfections; we can return in kind. Personal narrative is only annoying, when, by its length, it prevents reciprocity; if we find fault with a man for talking of himself, it is only when he leaves us no time to do the like. Of all virtues, modesty pays least. It may be wisdom to be humble, but it is folly to appear so. Extol your merits, and half the world will believe you; deny them, and all will agree. People are mostly taken at their own valuation; always, if the estimate be low. Who would disparage himself? Is it not natural that we should overrate, rather than underrate, our powers? It is human nature;

most of us, at least, feel that it is our nature ; and from ourselves we judge of others. Isabella spoke little about herself, and spoke modestly ; it is, therefore, no wonder that she was not popular with the multitude ; that is, with those whose opinion is not worth having.

Thus, neither Lady Ramsay nor Aurora gave Isabella credit for half the talents, or half the good qualities she possessed. The former, especially, was annoyed by Sir James's eternal harpings upon them. She was half inclined to be jealous of her husband ; and though the idea was absurd, it reconciled her, in some measure, to her own increased coldness towards Isabella, which her better feelings told her was unjust and undeserved. Moreover, it was pleasant thus to excuse her dislike to hear Isabella praised ; it was also very pleasant to believe herself freed from continual attendance upon Sir James. She tried to believe that his admiration for Isabella rendered him indifferent to herself. Why should she, therefore, take so much trouble with him ?

But Aurora remained his constant compa-

nion. She was no fonder of Isabella than Lady Ramsay, and she spoke out her mind much more openly. But Sir James cared less for what she said. Somehow, he could not bear to hear Lady Ramsay speak disparagingly of Miss Romaine, and it seemed almost as if he, on that account, preferred Aurora's company to his wife's.

Aurora would chatter away the whole evening, with uninterrupted good humour. The renouncement of a party, even the dull-est, was to her a tremendous sacrifice; yet she made it readily, and the consciousness of being useful to Sir James, amply made up for the loss of her amusement.

It must be confessed, that her little efforts to please him were not always very successful. He had become so much accustomed to Isabella's soft voice and graceful manner, that Aurora's noisy awkwardness irritated his nerves and his temper. But in all their little squabbles, Aurora's good nature got the better of his crossness.

One evening, when she had magnanimously given up a ball, at which she had every reason to believe that her delightfully-fatiguing

partner might appear, she could not resist a little grunt of impatience at Sir James's purposed misapprehension of various anecdotes which she had been relating for his entertainment. "Dear Sir James, it is so tiresome your not understanding me—I believe you're not listening, and people can't hear if they won't listen, you know."

"That is waste of breath. I knew that before."

"Really, Sir James, I never saw you so—" cross, she was going to say; but at that moment it struck her that he looked ill, and might be suffering, and she added: "I am afraid you are not well. Is anything the matter with you?"

"There is always something the matter with me. I am never well."

"Dear!" ejaculated Aurora, in a tone of such genuine sympathy, that Sir James could not help being touched by it.

"You must forgive me if I am cross and irritable. I suffer a great deal both in body, and—but no matter!"

"Cross! You are never cross. I only wish I saw you a great deal crosser, because

that is a sign of recovery, you know. During your illness, four years ago, you were as gentle as a lamb, and we were all afraid you were going to die; but one day you came down quite sharp upon me, because I upset a table, and broke a glass which was upon it, and from that moment the doctor said he would answer for your recovery. Dear! we were so glad! Lady Ramsay wept for joy."

"Was she really glad? Poor Fanny!"

"Glad! I should think so. You would not have had her sorry! And that night she went to bed, for the first time, since you had been taken ill."

"I believe she did not wish me to die after all. Poor thing!"

"My dear Sir James! don't you know it is quite wicked what you are saying there? I wish you had seen the long letter she wrote next day to Mr. Stanly, all about you."

A sudden change came over Sir James's face.

"Has she heard from him lately? Is he coming soon? How long will he stay?"

"Well now, I will tell you, though Lady Ramsay told me not—but you'll be so glad,

that I really must. What do you think of his really coming to-morrow, or next day? Won't it be nice?"

"And when is he going?"

"Oh, I don't know. Lady Ramsay and I will keep him as long as we can. We have settled *that* between us."

"What! keep him away from Isabella! that charming Isabella!"

"Well, so she is, I dare say, only I can't find it out—I can't get on with her. We never seem to have anything to say to one another, though I try all I can."

"Charles Stanly!" muttered Sir James—"Charles Stanly!"

As he did not seem inclined for further conversation, Aurora took a book, and began reading aloud to him. She looked up every now and then, to see if he was listening, and was rejoiced to find him all attention. He neither moved nor spoke the whole evening; until, at length, Aurora, hoarse and tired, was compelled to stop. "I must rest a little, Sir James. Nothing fatigues the voice more than reading aloud; but I hope you've been amused."

“Amused !” he said, as if he had not rightly comprehended her question. “Oh, yes, of course, very much amused—coming to-morrow ! but I’m glad you told me.”

He got up, and without even wishing Aurora good night, lighted his candle, and went to bed.

The next day, and the following, Lady Ramsay remained at home all the afternoon, on Sir James’s account, she said, and perhaps believed.

Sir James was, in fact, not very well ; but the doctors declared that there was nothing the matter, beyond his usual precarious state. His circulation was irregular, and the action of the heart feeble. Every annoyance must, as much as possible, be avoided ; a shock might, at any moment, prove fatal. But such had been the case, more or less, for several years. There was no material change in his condition.

This information could hardly account for the nervous restlessness betrayed by Lady Ramsay. Every noise made her start. Each time the door opened, she looked round in eager expectation, and then turned away with

a disappointed air. To expect, and be disappointed, is painful; but to have no cause for expectation or disappointment is worse.

She longed to see her dear boy again. For she pictured in her mind the same youthful face she last saw. Indeed, her imagination went back, instead of forward, and she thought of him most, as a student, and her champion. She tried to think of him only as such, and with her happy disposition to see what she wished, she mostly succeeded.

Yet she could not entirely silence her fears. She could not help wondering what detained Charles so long. Had any circumstance occurred to keep him at St. Petersburg? but in that case he would surely have written. Had any accident happened to him on the journey? but bad news flies swiftly—and why anticipate evil?

A vague dread of something worse than either detention or accident, lurked in Lady Ramsay's mind. Had he passed through London without seeing her? But such conduct would be cruel, ungrateful. She could not, would not believe it.

And until he was actually in the room with

her, and upon the sofa beside her, and until she really felt the pressure of his hand in hers, she was not aware how deeply that fearful idea had laid hold of her mind. It vanished, and she became conscious of its existence. A violent burst of tears first choked, then relieved her.

“ My dear Lady Ramsay,” he exclaimed, “ what is the matter ? Why do you cry thus ? ”

“ Because I am a foolish old woman. Because I had fancied that—all sorts of misfortunes had happened to—” my own boy, she was going to say, but she looked at Charles—and the words stuck in her throat.

His appearance was, indeed, no longer that of a boy. When she last saw him, he looked younger than he was ; now he seemed considerably older. If he had lost something of his former ingenuous naïveté, if his person was no longer slight and pliant, these deficiencies were more than atoned for by his manly beauty, and the athletic symmetry of his figure. His manner was now composed and self-possessed. Instead of being the ideal of a student, he was now the ideal of a diplomatist.

Lady Ramsay gazed at him again and again. Her eyes plainly spoke her surprise at the change in his appearance.

“Am I really so much altered?” he said; “you look as if you hardly recognised me.”

“Oh, I should have known you anywhere. But you are indeed altered; that is to say—” Again she stopped without finishing her sentence. She was going to jest about alteration being improvement; but somehow, she could not jest as of old. She could do nothing as of old.

She moved a little further from him, leant back upon the sofa, and said gently,

“In a little time, I shall recover from my surprise at your altered appearance. I shall, no doubt, soon get used to it. But I have been all along thinking of you as a boy, as a child almost; no wonder, therefore, that I am astonished and bewildered.”

In a moment, Charles had seen all that was passing in Lady Ramsay's mind. Four years' experience in diplomacy and otherwise, had sharpened perceptions naturally acute. He saw how much was flattering to himself in the nervous flurry of manner, so unusual to her;

and neither surprised nor displeased by the observation, he answered with undisturbed composure :

“ You are surprised that I am changed ; and I am astonished that you are not. This is, perhaps, an ambiguous compliment. But to my mind, no alteration could in you, be improvement.”

Once more Lady Ramsay attempted to jest. But it would not do ; his self-possession overawed her. She began something about growing old, and the inroads of time, but the confusion of her words betrayed the perturbation of her ideas.

“ You need not endeavour to express what you cannot possibly feel,” said Charles, with a meaning smile. “ It is vain to persuade me that you either look or feel old ; excuse the ugly word, but I use it, because you must know well that it is not applicable to you.”

Perhaps in all her life, Lady Ramsay had never looked so handsome as at that moment. Charles’s compliment did, what no other compliment had done for years, it called into her cheeks the blush of modesty, a blush so different from that either of vanity, or of shame.

She felt embarrassed like an inexperienced girl; her manner was diffident, even awkward; the ready answer was wanting. She forgot her brilliant glance, her winning smile; but she felt unutterably happy.

Instead of looking up as she spoke, she cast down her handsome eyes, and said in a tremulous voice, and half speaking to herself, "Three years and ten months—nearly four years—oh, it was a weary, weary time." Then suddenly changing her tone, and forestalling the answer which she felt that Charles was about to make, she proceeded, with well-feigned ease of manner, "But tell me of yourself, and of your past life. How do you like St. Petersburg? How has your time been spent there? Your letters have lately treated so much of politics, that you never left yourself room for gossip, and you know I am rather given to gossip." She forced a laugh as she finished her sentence.

"First tell me of what has been going on here. For you know that on account of the uncertainty of my movements, and the fear lest your letters might miscarry, I have not received any for a considerable time. Is my

uncle still in London, and where are Madame Rodostomus and her daughters?"

"Your uncle left London about a week ago, and took them all with him to Overdale."

"Indeed! and how did my uncle seem disposed towards me?"

"I hardly know; for of all the impenetrable and impracticable men I ever met with, never was one to compare with your uncle. I cannot account for the extraordinary fancy he has taken to the family. The report here was, that he had fallen in love with Chloe, and intended to lay at her feet, his sixty years and his sixty thousands a year; but this idea is so very preposterous, that I cannot give credit to it. He was certainly amused by Chloe's lively rattle, and no wonder, for she is very entertaining; but he never could be such a fool as to think of marrying a girl who, even by her own telling, is a professed *côquette*. She makes no secret of her egregious love of admiration, and utter disregard for the feelings of others."

"Yes, her reputation has spread to St. Petersburg. Over there I heard of the extraordinary lengths she will go. Her pleasure is

to excite to the utmost, while she herself remains unmoved; a detestable character. All my life I have had a peculiar horror of a coquette."

"*Et pour cause*," interrupted Lady Ramsay, "you are too great a flirt yourself. It is the very innocent or the very foolish who are the dupes of a coquette."

"Then my noble uncle is safe enough. In him, I should think, she has met with her match."

"I think so too. But her beauty and powers of fascination are very remarkable."

"Do you imagine that my uncle never saw a pretty woman before? And at sixty a man is not likely to be very impressionable. The susceptibility to beauty lasts but a very short time, as I know by experience. I was myself very susceptible of its attraction, but that is all over now."

Lady Ramsay was now able to laugh her old merry laugh, and to say, in her usual tone and manner, "Well done, Charles. Your diplomatic training has not been thrown away. I am happy to find that, having reached the venerable age of three-and-twenty, you are,

what you doubtless ought to be, impervious to the seductions of female beauty."

Charles's smile, and the obeisance which accompanied it, implied anything but a confirmation of Lady Ramsay's praise. She tried to laugh, but the merriment did not come naturally. Again, she cast down her eyes. Her confusion was, however, this time, only momentary, and she said, gaily :

" I must compliment you upon the wonderful improvement in your manners. There was formerly about you a certain flurry and *embarras*, pardonable enough in a boy, but decidedly *mauvais genre* in a man. Now, I am amazed at your calm self-possession. You have *les manières posées* to perfection, *un ton parfait, une tournure noble et distinguée*. One would think you had been brought up at Paris."

The bow with which Charles acknowledged this compliment, was evidently intended to prove how well it was deserved.

Lady Ramsay smiled approbation. " Well," she proceeded, " now that I have put you *au courant de nos affaires* here, satisfy me, *tant soit peu*, with respect to your own. How long

shall you remain in England? and do you propose returning to St. Petersburg?"

"My plans are still uncertain. I must apprise my uncle of my arrival, and see how he takes it. And as to returning to Russia, that will depend upon circumstances."

"Uncertainty and ambiguity. *Vive la diplomatic !*"

"Plainly, then, if I can get appointed elsewhere, I had rather not return to St. Petersburg. I trust to Lord Derwent's influence, or rather, I should say, to yours."

"I will do all I can. I will make immediate application to Lord Derwent, and get Frank to do the same. Frank has become quite a great man; his word is of infinite weight; and that he will exert himself on your behalf, I need not tell you."

"I have already had ample proofs of the kind interest of both brother and sister," replied Charles. "Indeed, I have reason to believe that it was through Frank's application that I was entrusted with the business which I have just—and I may say it to you—very creditably terminated. It will, doubtless, pave the way to something better. For

various reasons I wish to quit St. Petersburg. It is an expensive residence, and the style of society there is not such as I like. There is another reason too," he added, laughing, "but you will never guess it."

"Tell it me then, at once."

"Who do you think persecutes me with her protection?"

"How can I possibly tell?"

"My first flame. The fair lady with the ugly name."

"Molly—what was it—Fischer."

"The same. How she contrived to accommodate matters with her rich Russian, I do not know. Strange rumours are afloat, about which I do not care; but I confess, I cannot help being annoyed by the patronising way in which she honours me with her notice."

"How curiously things turn out! What sort of a being is the husband?"

"A man of weight, both really and metaphorically. It is said that he proposed to her in a state of intoxication, and was kept to his word by the muzzle of a pistol."

"Well done, Molly! But what a lucky escape you had there!"

At this period of the conversation little Aurora bounced into the room. "Dear Lady Ramsay, I wish you would come to Sir James. Somehow, I don't think he is well. He is, you know, not well, sometimes."

Lady Ramsay instantly vanished.

"How do you do, Miss Foster," said Charles. "I hope you have not quite forgotten me."

"Dear! how could I forget you? But you look much better than when I last saw you. Some people improve by years, others do not."

Charles not feeling any particular inclination to dispute the point, made no direct answer, but inquired after Sir James, and the other members of the party.

"Poor dear Sir James has been so well, till quite lately, and of course we were all so glad; and this morning he was rather better, and I went in, just now, to tell him that you were come, which I knew he would like to hear; and, instead of making any answer, he called for sal-volatile, and he seemed, somehow, to look strange, so altogether I thought it best to fetch Lady Ramsay, as she always knows exactly what is the matter with him, which

makes it more easy for her to doctor him, you know."

"A judicious conclusion. And how are all my other friends?"

"Oh," said little Aurora, with what she considered a knowing look, "they are all quite well, and she's lovely, lovelier than ever, only a little thinner and a little paler, but it's becoming to her, I assure you. *I* think her by far the handsomest of the two, and I don't mind what others think; and I'm sure she's the nicest, for Chloe is grown such a horrid little flirt, you can't think."

"I detest flirts," said Charles, strongly.

"I'm so glad—and so do I. I think it wrong." This was said confidentially. "But people will do wrong sometimes, and if one can't prevent it, there's no use saying anything about it. And as for Arethusa, she has been so much admired, and I really do think—but it's a secret, and you must promise not to tell—I really think, that she has made a real conquest at last." Here the confidential gutturals became inaudible.

"I wish the gentleman joy of so admirable a choice."

“ Shall I tell you all about it ?” exclaimed the delighted Aurora, puckering up her face, and blinking her little white eyes with pleasure. “ First, you must know—but it is so much more comfortable sitting than standing.” As she spoke, she prepared to seat herself upon a chair, which stood near, but, unhappily, not near enough. Forgetting to put her glass to her eye, she miscalculated the distance, and came with a tremendous thump upon the floor, striking, at the same time, her chin, audibly, against her knees.

It cost Charles no small effort to maintain his gravity. He did so, however, and assisted Aurora to rise, with a manner as courteous as if she had been the Empress of all the Russias *in propria personâ*. At last, when Aurora, having somewhat recovered from her shock, exclaimed—“ Dear ! how awkward I am, to be sure !” and asking pardon of Charles, as if it was he who had fallen, and that she was to blame for it, burst into a fit of uncontrollable laughter, Charles did condescend to smile, but in a most deferential and diplomatic manner.

In the course of the day he wrote to his

uncle; but without Lady Ramsay's assistance. He took great pains with his letter. He wrote it several times over, lopping off superfluous expressions, and rendering it more and more simple. It was not until he felt well satisfied with his composition, that he took another sheet of paper, and wrote to Isabella.

He dwelt largely upon his disappointment at finding she had left London before his arrival. "And yet," he proceeded, "it is, perhaps, best as it is. I have business to settle, which will occupy much of the time I would fain devote entirely to you. Meanwhile, pray endeavour to dispose Lord Overdale in my favour, and procure the invitation he once before hinted at. You can do anything with him you please. None can resist your influence. There is about you a sort of magnetism, which renders you more fit than any woman I ever yet met with, to move in the diplomatic world."

He then treated, at full length, of his plans for obtaining an appointment at some other court than St. Petersburg. Paris was his grand object. Lady Ramsay would apply in

his favour to Lord Derwent; his services in Russia would tell favourably, and he had little doubt of being appointed paid *attaché* to the embassy at Paris.

Charles's letter to Isabella was thoroughly confidential, but it was not written with what the French call *effusion*. He wrote too circumstantially and too accurately. He appealed to her judgment rather than to her feelings. It was a clever letter. Isabella would have wished it less clever.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN due course of post, Charles received answers to both his epistles.

He first opened that from Lord Overdale. It ran thus :

“ I have the pleasure of acknowledging your letter, apprising me of your safe arrival in England. The motives which prompted you to give me so early an intimation of that fortunate event are, I assure you, thoroughly appreciated by me.

“ Circumstances have occurred which induce me to alter, in some measure, the line of conduct I have hitherto thought fit to maintain towards you. It is now my wish that you come to Overdale as soon as it may be convenient to do so. I anticipate the plea-

sure of receiving you with impatience equal, no doubt, to that with which you look forward to meeting me.

“ OVERDALE.”

Charles tossed the letter angrily from him. Then he took it up again, and read it over more carefully. “ Well !” he said to himself, as he folded it and put it in his desk, “ I suppose I must take what I can get, and be thankful. I must endeavour to deal with this eccentric old gentleman according to his humour. The best way, in this world, is to take people as we find them.”

Having adopted this heroic resolution, he opened Isabella’s letter. A smile of pleasure lit up his face as he read the first page. “ Kind Isabella !” he said within himself. “ But she really thinks too highly of me. Not that I object to be overrated by her !” He went on reading half aloud : “ ‘ The just reward of your exertions—merit, sooner or later, makes its way.’ She is right there, I certainly did exert to the utmost. ‘ *Attaché* at Paris.’ Dear Isabella ! ‘ So that I advance in my career, and she is with me,

the locality is immaterial.' I cannot, however, quite agree to that. Besides, I am sure she herself would like Paris better than any other place. But what is this about Lady Ramsay? 'Not to be too much directed by her.' Why not? 'Inconsiderate.' No, not inconsiderate, but impulsive. I rather like impulsive women. 'Love of intrigue.' Nonsense. 'A dangerous guide.' No such thing. Besides, I should think I knew how to guide myself. I wish Isabella would be kind enough to keep her advice till I ask for it. I have a high opinion of her judgment, but in such matters she has no experience, and I have. What! 'She wants me to ask Frank Tyrrell's opinion on the subject, before I take any decided steps.' She is always writing to me about Frank Tyrrell. I wish she would leave Frank Tyrrell alone. No doubt he is a kind-hearted fellow, and has been of great service to me, for which I am very grateful. I don't want to depreciate either his abilities, or his friendliness, only it is tiresome to have him eternally thrust in one's face. He is an excellent fellow in his way, but by no means the oracle she seems to

think him. Halloo! what is this? So my uncle has been consulting him; that, indeed, alters the case. 'The only man whose judgment Lord Overdale appears to value, is soon coming to Overdale for the purpose of being consulted upon business in which I am concerned.' Business! what business, I wonder! At all events, I must see Tyrrell directly. I must consult him. Oh yes, she is right, quite right."

Thus soliloquising, he glanced rapidly over the remainder of Isabella's letter. Then he carefully put his uncle's into an envelope, together with a slip of paper, on which he wrote these words in pencil: "Read the enclosed. My reply to it will depend upon what you hear from Lord Derwent; but a decision must be made soon. Can you not press the latter for an answer to our application?" He addressed the envelope to Lady Ramsay, who had not yet appeared, and desired the servant to give it her as soon as she came down stairs. Then, taking his hat, he went out in quest of Frank Tyrrell.

Frank was, as usual, in his study, hard at

work. He received Charles kindly ; they had not met since the latter's arrival.

After the first greeting was over, they stood for a few moments, regarding each other in silence. Each was struck by the altered appearance of the other. The improvement in Charles's personal appearance was as remarkable as the reverse in Frank. Frank, indeed, looked very ill, but neither expressed the surprise he felt. A certain unpleasant sensation of restraint was upon each ; it was some time before either could conquer it.

But the absurdity of their embarrassment struck them both ; and endeavouring to laugh it off, Frank began talking upon indifferent topics.

At last Charles took courage, and led the conversation to the object of his visit.

“ So I find,” he said, after some preamble, “ that you have the ear of my dearly beloved uncle. I wish you would put in a good word in favour of his most dutiful nephew.”

“ I have already done my best, and only wish I had succeeded better.”

“ Thank you, my kind friend,” said Charles,

touched by the unmistakable tone of truth which pervaded Frank's words. "And Isabella writes me that he has been consulting you upon business in which I am concerned."

"Hardly that. But he said that he might probably have to consult me, and he has asked me to visit him at Overdale, to talk further."

"Indeed! on what subject? And what does he propose doing for me?"

"I cannot tell you, for I do not think his purpose is yet fixed. He wishes to see you first."

"At all events you must be able to form a pretty correct guess what he means to do for me?"

"Lord Overdale is not a man whose purposes are easily guessed."

"But what is he hesitating about? On what points is he going to consult you? Tell me, in short, all you know."

"I know very little, and the little I do know I am not at liberty to disclose. He enjoined the strictest secrecy."

"Which on no account I would induce you to break. But you might give me a bit of friendly advice with respect to the best way of

getting over the old gentleman. Just a mere hint, that's a good fellow !”

“The best advice I can give you is to be open and frank with him. He is a man of keen penetration, and abhors nothing so much as falsehood.”

“But without falsehood, one would like not to run one's head against his crotchets. And a precious lot he has, if I mistake not.”

“Yes ; but he is quite aware of the fact. He has very extraordinary insight. He reads people's minds, and estimates their motives more clearly than any man I ever knew. He is, moreover, not apt to put the best construction upon them. Don't attempt to flatter him or to fawn upon him ; be straightforward and honest.”

“Do you think he approves of my diplomatic career ? Is he aware with what important business I was entrusted ?”

“He is aware of everything.”

“And his approval of my conduct has, of course, worked this change in his opinion of me ?”

“I do not think so, though, indeed, I hardly know ; but this I do know—you had

better go at once to Overdale and judge for yourself. I will follow as soon as I can get away from my business."

"But I have put in a claim for advancement. I have asked for an interview with Lord Derwent. Before leaving town, I must wait for his answer."

"It can follow you to Overdale. You had better go there while your uncle is in the humour to receive you."

"I had rather wait for the answer. A few days sooner or later cannot possibly make any difference."

"No difference!" Frank looked full at Charles as he spoke.

Charles involuntarily winced. But he did not, or did not choose to fathom the expression which at that moment shone in Frank's clear blue eye, as he said with marked emphasis :

"Do as you will. I can advise no further."

"After all, perhaps you are right—I dare say you are right; I think so indeed. I will go directly and write to my uncle, and tell him that I will come immediately." He spoke with a good deal of nervous flurry; then took a hasty leave of Frank and went away.

As soon as he was gone, Frank's composure left him. He moved his head up and down with an air of profound melancholy. "So utterly unworthy of her!—so heartless! so hopelessly irreclaimable!" he said, unconscious that he was speaking aloud. "Oh, the pity! the sad, sad pity!"

After remaining for some time with his head leaning upon his hand, he sighed heavily. "One friend at least will never neglect her," he said to himself. "One friend on earth, and God in heaven." Then replacing before him the papers, which in his agitation he had thrust aside, he resumed his work with that air of fixed resignation now habitual to him.

Charles, meanwhile, returned to Belgrave-square, fully determined to follow Frank's advice. As he walked along, he composed in his mind the letter which he intended to send to his uncle by that day's post, announcing his immediate arrival at Overdale.

Lady Ramsay met him on the stairs. "Where on earth have you been?" she said. "I have been sending half over London to look for you."

“ I have been to your brother’s. Is anything the matter ? ”

“ Oh, no, *au contraire*, ” she said, laughing. “ But just as I was going to do as you told me, and send to Lord Derwent’s, I received this note from him. I had no idea of the difficulty of the exchange I solicited, but I think I have succeeded. Lord Derwent is not the only one I have applied to. In fact, Charles, I have been moving heaven and earth *à votre intention*. But come to my boudoir; I want to show you Lord Derwent’s note. ”

He followed her into the boudoir, and she showed him a most amiable note from the great man, appointing the day after the following for an interview with Charles. In the note was an allusion, almost amounting to a promise of the desired exchange.

“ Well ! ” exclaimed Lady Ramsay, triumphantly, “ is my diplomacy successful or not ? ” She looked into his face with her peculiar glance.

“ Was you ever unsuccessful in anything you desired ? ”

“ Pray believe me omnipotent. I would

fain think so too, and keep up my self-confidence, but——”

“ But what, Lady Ramsay ?”

“ Do you know, that of all people in the world, I believe you to be the one over whom I have least influence ?”

“ Lady Ramsay !” he exclaimed, with astonishment, “ that is indeed an unjust accusation.”

“ You would not say so, if you knew how nervous I am about asking you a favour—a very trifling favour, which would cost you nothing—and yet I despair of your granting it.”

“ That suspicion is unkind, and I had rather you were unjust, than unkind.”

“ The theory is good, and the sentence well turned.”

“ Come, Lady Ramsay, disclose this mighty mystery. *Si la chose est possible elle est faite, si elle est impossible, elle se fera,*” said Charles, his spirits rising higher and higher, as he read over, and over again, Lord Derwent’s note, which he still held in his hand.

“ You will think me a sad fool, for making

such a fuss about a mere trifle; but it is important to me. I am going to give a dinner at Richmond—I have a reason for doing it—on my sister's account,—and I want you to act as my cavalier on the occasion.”

“Of course I will, and with the greatest pleasure. When is it to come off?”

“That is the thing. It may not take place for a week, but it will not be longer.”

“But at that time I shall not be in London. I shall only wait to see Lord Derwent, and then start immediately for Overdale.”

“Remember, Charles, it may be long—very long before I see you again.”

“I hope not. The tone of my uncle's letter is not so excessively cordial as to make me wish to stay long with him.”

“So you refuse me five days—only five days, perhaps not so long? Well! it is only what I expected.” As she spoke these words, in a soft, sad tone of voice, she made a rapid gesture, by which she, as if by chance, jerked Lord Derwent's letter out of Charles's hand—the letter containing a promise so important to Charles, and obtained through her means.

She stooped to pick it up. Charles marked the disappointed expression of her countenance as she did so, and he could not help reproaching himself with ingratitude towards one, who had so kindly exerted herself for him, and in a manner so gratifying to his feelings.

“What day is it that I am to see Lord Derwent?” said Charles, slowly.

“The day after to-morrow.”

“And your Richmond party?”

“Oh, never mind that,” she said, with a sigh.

“But I do mind it. I mind it exceedingly. When is it to take place?”

“Four or five days later than the interview with Lord Derwent, for which you are going to wait.”

“I am going to wait for your party.”

“Four whole days, Charles!”

He replied by a smile, which, however, again changed into a more doubtful expression. Lady Ramsay saw what was passing in his mind, and said, quickly, “Thank you, Charles, thank you. I accept this little sacrifice at your hands, because I think I deserve

it. Your uncle cannot be offended at your waiting to see Lord Derwent, upon a subject so very important. He need not know the precise day on which the interview is to take place. Believe me, Charles, he will be all the more inclined in your favour, when he finds that you have managed to obtain so honourable an appointment. *Aide toi, Dieu t'aidera*, has been his maxim through life." Then, after a short pause, she added, "I am more touched than I can express, by this proof of your friendship."

The interview with Lord Derwent was highly satisfactory. The great man was pleased with Charles's manner and address. In fact, Charles knew how to hit the medium between restraint and familiarity, which is so pleasing to those above ourselves in rank. He was deferential, without being obsequious.

In the course of a quarter of an hour, everything was settled. Next day, Charles's nomination appeared in the papers.

Frank was the first to congratulate him upon his appointment. He was in Belgrave-square before Lady Ramsay had come down to breakfast.

After many cordial expressions of satisfaction, Frank said, "I suppose you will be off to Overdale immediately. I am going to-morrow. We had better travel together."

Charles replied, with some confusion, "Between ourselves, I wish I could go with you; but your sister extorted from me a promise, which I was foolish enough to grant. She wants me to wait for a party she is going to give at Richmond. She made such a point of it, and as it is to her I owe Lord Derwent's favour, I thought I ought not to refuse her."

Had Frank's countenance expressed surprise only, Charles, elated as he was, might not have noticed it; but the look of contempt it also wore, cut him to the quick. He was about to say something, he hardly knew what, when, to his inexpressible relief, Lady Ramsay came down.

She was in brilliant spirits, and in first-rate looks. She knew that Charles would keep his word, and that she should have the pleasure of his company at her party, as well as the triumph of detaining him four whole days from Isabella. She chose to think that

Isabella was too indifferent to care much about it. Moreover, she was provoked with Isabella, as well for her coldness towards herself, as for the unaccountable fancy, as she persisted in calling it, that Sir James had taken to her. She could talk of nothing but her party, and Frank saw that she was in no mood to receive admonition. Therefore, after exchanging a few unmeaning common-places, he took leave.

The Richmond party was the prevailing topic. During the four days yet intervening, the number of notes despatched and received, was marvellous. Aurora had the pleasure of writing most of them. Each day was more delightfully fatiguing than its predecessor. That before the party was indeed a busy afternoon. Provisions were ordered and prepared. Aurora had a finger everywhere. She sat up late, to see that all was right. She got up early, to be sure that nothing was wrong.

The evening had been promising, but the morning was dull and gloomy. The weather had lately been so fine, that no one had contemplated the possibility of a change. "Who

would have thought it?" was the chorus at breakfast.

The weather, as it seemed, had its discouraging effect upon Sir James. He would not get up at his usual hour, and when he came down stairs, he was fractious and irritable.

Lady Ramsay's smiles and caresses did not produce their wonted effect. His "What engagements for to-day, Fanny?" was spoken without even looking at her.

"He is cross with me this morning," she whispered to Aurora. "He pretends to forget about Richmond. Do *you* remind him."

Aurora seated herself upon a stool at Sir James's feet, and puckering up her face, in her pleasantest manner, "I've such a piece of news for you, Sir James," she said, inwardly chuckling.

But he testified no extraordinary anxiety upon the subject, so she went on:

"Do you remember where you are going to-day? You'll never guess. It will be so nice!"

"I'm going to stay at home."

"Indeed you are not," she coaxingly proceeded. "You are coming to Richmond.

And what do you think? there are to be fireworks. There!" she added, with exultation.

"No such thing; nonsense—bad weather."

"I assure you it will be very fine—and you will like it so much! and the drive will do you so much good! Drives often do do you good, you know."

Sir James looked hesitatingly at the window.

"Say yes, dear Sir James," said Lady Ramsay, in her softest accents. Sir James looked at her affectionately. "I ordered the fireworks on purpose for you. I know you like them. And here are mamma and Arethusa just arrived, and all ready to start. They will be so disappointed, for they cannot go without me, and if you do not go, I will not either," she added, taking one of his hands.

"Well! pretty Fanny—if you like." Just then, Charles entered the room, with the words, "The barometer is rising; we shall have a fine afternoon. Your usual good fortune, Lady Ramsay."

"I have a charter for fine weather, you know," she replied, smiling.

“There will be a storm,” said Sir James. “There is thunder in the air; I feel it, and I won’t go.”

“Oh, Sir James!” echoed from all sides.

“You know you promised,” pleaded Aurora; “and it will be such a disappointment, and it is so disagreeable to be disappointed.”

Sir James shook his head, waved Aurora out of his way, and repeated, two or three times over, in a positive tone, “I won’t go—I won’t go.”

“Here’s a fuss about nothing!” said Arethusa, tossing her ringlets. “As if Sir James might not be left for *one* afternoon. It is not only ridiculous, but laughable of Fanny to spoil him so.”

“I am sure I do not care about the party,” lisped Mrs. Tyrrell. “Indeed, I am hardly equal to the fatigue of it, but it distresses me to see a child of mine so vulgarly conjugal. It is contrary to all etiquette. I could not have thought it.”

“I really do not see why you should not leave Sir James for once,” said Charles, in an under tone, to Lady Ramsay. “He would

not enjoy the party after all, and somebody would be obliged constantly to attend to him."

"That is all true," replied Lady Ramsay, hesitating; "and yet, I don't know why, but I have a peculiar dislike to leave him to-day."

"My last day," persisted Charles; "and I stayed expressly for this party."

"Do come with us, dear Sir James," said Lady Ramsay, as if she had not heard Charles's remark.

"No, no—I can't—I won't." Lady Ramsay still hesitated. She looked first at Sir James, then at Charles, then again at Sir James.

"She will give it all up," said Arethusa to Aurora. "I see she will. She has served me that trick before. And Lord John is to be there!"

"Dear!" exclaimed Aurora, "is he? Well, I guessed as much. It really would be a pity. But I've thought of something. I know what I will do."

She bounced up to Lady Ramsay. "Do

you know, I've such a headache just come on, all of a sudden. Isn't it odd my having a headache? But people do sometimes have headaches, you know. So I'll stay with Sir James, and you may all go and enjoy yourselves," she added, gulping a sigh. Then speaking very loud and very hoarsely, to cover a certain quaking in her voice, she proceeded: "I shall like it very much indeed. Won't it be nice, Sir James, my staying with you? We'll amuse ourselves very well, won't we?"

Sir James turned away impatiently. "No, no," exclaimed Lady Ramsay; "I cannot hear of such a thing. This is just the sort of party you like."

"When she is well," put in Arethusa. "But don't you see how ill she looks? Dearest thing!" added the beauty, tenderly embracing her friend, "you look as pale as death."

"She really looks quite interesting and lady-like. Miss Foster, I feel interested about you," said Mrs. Tyrrell, sympathisingly.

"Oh, Charles," said Lady Ramsay, turning

towards the latter, "I really cannot let her stay at home. She would enjoy the party more than any of us."

"She will have just as much enjoyment at home," whispered Charles, laughing. "She enjoys everything. I think it would be a sin to deprive her of so innocent a pleasure." Lady Ramsay smiled, but still shook her head. "If you do not go," he proceeded, in a louder voice, "the whole thing is spoilt. What are we to do with ourselves all day in London? If you stay with Sir James, I shall see nothing of you. And remember, it is my *last* day," he added, in a tone such as to reach her ear only.

"And it is already too late to put off the party," said Arethusa.

"And it would be ill-bred to keep them waiting—quite shockingly ill-bred," said Mrs. Tyrrell.

"I have put off my journey on purpose," persisted Charles. "It may be long before you see me again."

Lady Ramsay sighed. Then, turning towards Aurora, "You certainly do look ill," she said. "Is there anything serious the matter?"

“ Oh, no !” exclaimed the good-humoured little girl ; “ nothing at all ; only I had really rather stay at home.”

Lady Ramsay kissed her clumsy, convex forehead. “ Thank you, dear Aurora,” she said, softly. “ You are a good, kind, unselfish girl, and I love you dearly.”

Aurora, overjoyed with this compliment, began talking so fast and so loud, that she must have achieved a headache, if she had not already been provided with one.

The clouds became blacker and blacker. They scudded ominously before the wind. Sir James sat at the window watching them, and pointing to those which looked most threatening. At last rain began to fall. “ I told you so,” said he. “ It is folly. Can’t she stay at home *one* day ?”

Lady Ramsay pretended not to hear. “ Now, dear Sir James,” pleaded Aurora, “ just think how often dear Lady Ramsay has stayed at home with you, and just please to consider, that it’s not civil to me what you are saying, for it looks as if you expected to tire of my company, and I mean to do so much to amuse you !—and as for the rain, it will go off in a

minute or two, you'll see. Rain does go off, you know ; and if it would only clear up, I'm sure it would be very fine indeed ; and in summer it is much more likely to be fine than in winter. I'm sure it will be fine to-day, indeed. It has stopped raining already, I do believe. Yes, I declare, I think I see a ray of sunshine ; only look, Sir James !”

Charles, who was standing behind her, burst out laughing. “ I see the reflection of a candle in the window of the opposite house.”

“ I'm ill,” muttered Sir James—“ I'm ill. Leave me alone.”

During Aurora's consolatory speech, Lady Ramsay and the other ladies had gone to make preparations for starting ; she returned just in time to hear the last sentence.

“ Never mind,” said Aurora, stopping the words which she saw Lady Ramsay was about to utter, “ he's only a little bit cross ; but I'll get him round in no time. As soon as you are gone, he'll come right again ; so the sooner you're off the better.”

Lady Ramsay remained standing at the door ; Sir James continued looking out of the window, with his back towards her.

“Come, Lady Ramsay,” said Charles, “Miss Foster is right; the sooner we go the better. The carriage is at the door.”

Lady Ramsay took her cloak from off a *prie-dieu* chair, on which it had been deposited.

“So you are putting on your cloak,” said little Aurora, resting one knee upon the seat of the chair, and her chin upon the back of it. “So you are really going?” And she glanced wistfully at her own cloak upon a neighbouring sofa.

“If I thought Sir James seriously ill, I would let you go and make some apology to the people, and stay with him,” said Lady Ramsay, nervously.

“Now, I declare you are jealous!” exclaimed Aurora, brisking up. “He’s not a bit ill, so don’t alarm yourself.” Then going to Sir James, she said, “Sir James, only think of Lady Ramsay being jealous of my staying with you; she wants to let them all go without her, but she shan’t cheat me out of my nice tête-à-tête. Say good-by to her, Sir James,” she whispered in his ear.

Sir James looked kindly at little Aurora, and then, without turning to his wife, muttered

feebly, "Good-by, Fanny; amuse yourself; be happy and—good," he added, inaudibly.

"Happy people!" exclaimed Aurora, very mournfully, as she watched the carriage drive from the door; and she brushed the back of her hand across her eyes; "but we'll be happy too, Sir James. Come, let me read the newspaper to you. There's such a story about a murder!"

When once fairly off, all Lady Ramsay's nervousness vanished. She looked at Charles; thought how very good-natured it was of him to give up his journey for her party; and wondered how she could, for a moment, have dreamt of staying at home. She remembered how often she had unnecessarily done so before. Sir James's complaint, being chiefly upon his nerves, made him apt to fancy himself more ill than he really was. In fact, he was always languid in the morning; there was no doubt the would be better after his luncheon. She was secretly glad that he had declined joining the party; it was much better for him to remain at home; she would have been constantly uneasy lest he should catch cold, or even fatigue himself.

Such were her cogitations during the first half hour. Her spirits rose as the weather cleared up. Long before they got to Richmond, the sun was shining brightly, and she was talking and laughing with Charles, as if there had been no Sir James in the world.

Most of the party had already arrived. Lady Ramsay was hailed by all with pleasure. Some went on the river, others wandered in the park. They met at dinner, apparently well satisfied with their morning's amusement.

The dinner went off admirably. The dishes were well ordered, and the wine excellent. Lady Ramsay's French cook and English butler had exerted themselves to good purpose.

Lady Ramsay, too, exerted herself. She was most agreeable. Everybody seemed pleased, Charles especially. Although seated at the further end of the table, Lady Ramsay, by starting subjects with which she knew him to be conversant, drew him into conversation with those at her end of it. He felt that he had held his part well, and he saw that he had thus risen in the estimation of the company.

The wine circulated freely, and the party broke up in high spirits. Charles, elated by

his conversational success, declared that it was a pity not to take a walk ; the moon was shining gloriously, and there would be plenty of time for a stroll before the fireworks.

His proposal was received with universal applause. The party went into the park, and there, casting off the etiquette which they had maintained within doors, they paired off—not according to rank, but according to choice.

“ Lady Ramsay,” said Charles, offering her his arm, “ I have to thank you for one of the most delightful days I ever spent. The whole thing has gone off admirably.”

She took his arm, but made no reply. They walked on for some minutes in silence.

“ You are the most skilful leader of conversation I ever met with. You make people talk exactly upon the subjects you choose, while all the time they think that they are selecting their own.”

“ I am glad that your day has not been spent disagreeably. I hope you will look back, without regret, upon the last hours we passed together.”

Charles was surprised at her tone of melan-

choly. A few minutes before, her voice had been gay and sprightly above the rest. "Regret," he exclaimed. "How can you talk of regret! I shall always consider this day as one of the happiest of my life."

"And I as one of the saddest."

"Lady Ramsay!" he exclaimed, with astonishment.

"It is better never to know happiness than to mourn its loss. Past joy becomes pain."

"What can have caused this sudden change in your spirits? Just now, you were all wit and brilliancy. Nothing can since have happened to annoy you. You are not ill—I hope you are not ill, Lady Ramsay?"

"This time to-morrow how little you will think or care whether I am ill or well; this time to-morrow we shall be as strangers to each other, Charles."

"Strangers? never! You and I strangers?"

An involuntary pressure of his arm caused Lady Ramsay, from some unknown motive, to stop for a moment and hold him back. She was about to speak, but instead of doing so, she began walking on faster than before.

"Neither my uncle—nor any one else," he

added, in a lower tone, "shall ever change me with regard to you."

"Oh, Charles, if you spoke truth!" Her voice was full of feeling. Charles felt upon him the lustrous glance which there was not light enough to distinguish.

"Can you doubt it—*you*?"

Her hand was in his. How this happened neither of them knew or sought to know. A bench was near them; they sat down upon it. There was a long silence.

A violent crash of thunder dispelled their reverie. They started up. The night had become so dark that they could hardly see each other, as they stood side by side. "How suddenly the storm has come on," said Lady Ramsay. "But a moment ago the moon was shining brightly. Come, let us return to the hotel."

They did their best to reach it. But the time, which to them appeared so short, was really considerable. They had walked to some distance among the trees, and now, in the darkness, they missed their way. After a variety of turns, they found themselves again by the bench upon which they had been sitting.

“This is dreadful!” said Lady Ramsay. “What will the people think of me? What shall we do?”

“The only thing to do is to persevere till we find the right path,” said Charles. “Though farther than we intended, we cannot have walked very far.”

His composure somewhat reassured Lady Ramsay. She took his arm, and let herself be led by him. It was, however, some time before they got out of the thicket, and then they had still to walk a good way before they reached the hotel.

The rain was now falling in torrents. Lady Ramsay was wet through. But she thought little of this circumstance, when she was informed by the waiters that the party had dispersed some time ago. They had left word to say that, fearing the approach of the storm, they thought it wisest to shift for themselves, hoping that Lady Ramsay would excuse them, &c. &c.

There was nothing to be done but to get a fly, and drive to the station as soon as possible. Unfortunately, some time was lost in seeking one. Meanwhile, Charles urged Lady Ramsay

to put on dry clothes, but the only precaution she would take was to wrap herself up in his cloak. Her uneasiness increased every moment.

At last a fly was procured. Charles and Lady Ramsay got into it, and drove at full speed to the station. A train was on the point of starting. They had just time to buy their tickets and rush into it.

When fairly off, Lady Ramsay was more at ease; at least more able to appear so. However, she was still terribly haunted by fear of what Sir James might think of her delay, and at a loss in what manner to explain it. All her efforts to keep up any conversation with Charles were fruitless.

“Here we are,” he said, as the train stopped, “arrived, all safe. There are plenty of people about, so it cannot be very late. We need not have put ourselves in such a terrible fright. By Jove, this is worst of all!”

“What is the matter? What has happened?” exclaimed Lady Ramsay.

“In our hurry, we have got into a wrong train, and are now at Windsor, instead of London.”

Lady Ramsay fell back in her seat, speechless with dismay.

She heard Charles inquire how soon the London train would pass ; but what was her horror at the reply—"No more would pass that night."

"Good God!" exclaimed Lady Ramsay in agony. "I am ruined, undone! Oh, Charles, Charles, what shall I do?"

Charles made no answer, but leapt out of the carriage, and then turned to assist Lady Ramsay. A brilliant flood of light, from a gas-lamp, opposite to which the train had stopped, fell full upon her. It lent an unwonted softness and delicacy to her face and figure.

It might be that Charles's eyes expressed the admiration he felt ; something, at least, caused Lady Ramsay to blush and cast down hers.

She took his arm, and let him lead her towards the hotel, which was at some yards' distance. She trembled so much that she could scarcely walk along ; Charles drew her arm tightly within his.

Lady Ramsay's bewilderment was such, that

she could not tell whether certain low wailings, which reached her ear, were real or not. She shuddered each time she heard them, but she had no voice to question Charles, and no courage to look whence they might proceed.

“ Fanny !” said a faint moan close to Lady Ramsay’s ear.

“ Sir James !” she screamed, but soon recovering herself, “ Good Heavens ! mamma,” she said, “ how came you here ?”

“ Oh, my ungrateful children !” exclaimed Mrs. Tyrrell. It must certainly be confessed, that Lady Ramsay expressed no very extraordinary joy at this unexpected meeting with her parent.

Charles muttered something between his teeth which sounded very like an oath. It was, however, with true diplomatic courtesy, that he made all the requisite inquiries and offers of service.

“ To be left behind, to be forgotten by my children ! oh, it is too shocking, too horrible !” sobbed the exasperated lady. “ Arethusa, oh, Arethusa !”

Lady Ramsay now, for the first time, re-

collected that she had seen nothing of Arethusa since dinner. Her conscience smote her for not having thought of her sister. Arethusa's conduct had, of late, been very odd, and strange suspicions had, more than once, crossed Lady Ramsay's mind, to the effect that she was carrying on some clandestine intrigue, and that Lord John was only the ostensible object of her affections. "My dear mother!" she exclaimed in great alarm, "where is she, where is Arethusa?"

But Mrs. Tyrrell was unable to make any intelligible answer. It was not until some time after they had got her stretched upon the sofa, before a large fire, in the best parlour of the hotel, that she could make her hearers comprehend what had occurred.

Mrs. Tyrrell, however unobservant and indifferent as regarded things in general, was an attached and even a watchful mother. She, too, had been struck by the symptoms which alarmed Lady Ramsay. She had observed Arethusa write and despatch sundry mysterious notes; she had remarked the flutter of manner with which she received Mr. Preston, and the indignation with which she repelled

Aurora's jokes respecting him. These things had caused her considerable uneasiness, and it was brought to a climax by Arethusa's conduct at dinner that day. She had been quite rude to Lord John, and devoted herself to Mr. Preston, to whom, contrary to her sister's wish, she had sent an invitation. Not satisfied with flirting with him all dinner-time, she had taken his arm, to walk in the park. "Why did you let her do such a thing, Fanny? How could you reconcile it to yourself to let her do it?"

"How could I help it? You know I gave the dinner on purpose for her and Lord John. She *would* invite Mr. Preston, though I begged her not to do so. But where is she now? You have not yet told me, and I am very anxious to hear."

"I only wish I knew myself. How could she behave so! I am sure I gave her the best education."

"But where did you see her last? My dear mother, do tell me!"

"At the academy where she was brought up, were the daughters of three earls and a marquis! What could a mother do more?"

“But what has become of her now?”

“That is just what I am asking you, Fanny, and you won’t tell me—and a duke’s daughter had been educated at that same academy only a short time before.”

“Did you leave her at Richmond, alone with Mr. Preston?”

“Fanny! What a dreadful idea! I walked behind them till I nearly died of the fatigue; they seemed to be quarrelling, I thought. I followed as fast as I could—ran all the way to the station. I saw them get into a carriage; I hastened, but arrived too late; the train had started before I reached the platform. I got into the next, and here I am—dead with fatigue, and miserable about my child.”

Lady Ramsay was not much less so. She was uneasy on her sister’s account, but most on her own. What would Sir James think? She bitterly reproached herself for having left him on a day when he was so unwilling to part with her. She could not dispel the gloomy thoughts which would intrude upon her; and they were painful hours which intervened, before the bell announcing the early train to London was heard to ring.

CHAPTER IX.

WITH exemplary patience, Aurora read aloud to Sir James a succession of all the morning newspapers. It may be doubted how far he was benefited by her exertions, to judge, at least, by the answers he made to her pertinent observations.

“Wonderful things, newspapers, certainly,” she said, after some reflection; “and printing really is a very valuable discovery.”

“Did you never think of that before?” replied Sir James, impatiently.

“Dear! now really!—but there’s no harm making an observation, you know. Which paper shall I read now?”

“Oh! any you like—the *Times*.”

“But, dear Sir James, that is the very one I’ve just finished. Don’t you remember how

hard they are upon the minister, whom they think is getting out of favour ?”

“No. But never mind ; read the *Chronicle*.”

The *Chronicle* was disposed of ; Aurora looked up in her little sagacious way. “It’s curious the newspapers contradicting one another so flatly, and it’s very difficult knowing which to believe ; I never do, I’m sure. It’s puzzling, very. Shall I read any more, Sir James ?”

He started as if from a dream. “Anything you please ; the *Times*.”

“Over again !”

“Did you read it before ? well, the *Chronicle*.”

“But I’ve just read it. Don’t you recollect it was so interesting about the poor girl who made shirts for sixpence a day, and never got paid. It was such a shame. Don’t you remember ?”

“No. But read something else.”

In this satisfactory and profitable manner the time passed till luncheon. After he had swallowed his two glasses of wine, Sir James allowed Aurora to assure him that he was better ; and, after a great deal of persuasion, he consented to take a drive.

Sir James was restless, both in mind and body; he fidgeted about in the carriage, pulled the glasses up and down, gave constant and contradictory orders to the coachman, and ever and anon kept ejaculating: "I wish Fanny had stayed at home. I can't think what made her choose such a day as this for going to Richmond. It will thunder before night—I am sure it will."

Aurora argued that it did not always thunder when people thought it would—that she did not see why Lady Ramsay should be in greater danger in Richmond than if she had stayed in London—that it could do no good his being uneasy, and, therefore, that he had better not.

These ingenious arguments, often repeated, sufficed for entertainment during the drive.

On reaching home, Sir James eagerly inquired at what hour my lady had ordered the carriage to meet her at the station? "At ten," was the reply.

"Let it be there a quarter before," he said.

Sir James, to Aurora's infinite distress, ate very little dinner. He did not even seem to relish his favourite soup, mullagatawny.

Aurora had [adroitly put three spoonfuls, instead of two, into his plate ; but he, although unaware of the deceit, scarcely tasted it, and pushed the plate aside, saying, in a tone half-fractious, half-melancholy, “ I don’t like it ; it is very odd, but I don’t like it.”

“ Dear ! Sir James, if you would only try a little more. It’s so nice, and I’m sure you would like it, if you would but only just taste the least drop more. It’s capital, quite.” And Aurora poured into her mouth a large table-spoonful of scalding mullagatawny, and valiantly swallowed the same, together with the lining of her own throat. After this feat, she grinned with pain, as the tears started in her eyes ; but she persisted stoutly in saying, “ It’s so nice, Sir James, if you would only taste it—just to please me, you know. It’s delicious, quite.”

But all Aurora’s eloquence was vain. . He would not eat, and he would talk about the impending storm. He wondered at what time Fanny had ordered dinner at Richmond, he calculated how long the meal would probably last, and speculated as to the probability of her returning before the hour she

had appointed. Good little Aurora wondered, calculated, and speculated likewise.

Presently Sir James rose, rang the bell, and desired the servant to have the carriage sent immediately to the station. The man hesitated, and seemed about to remonstrate; but a peremptory "Immediately" caused him to execute Sir James's order without delay or comment.

"I think Fanny will return to tea," said Sir James—"Fanny likes her tea."

"So she does, I declare," returned Aurora, "and she may return, of course. She would like very much to return, I dare say, but people can't always do what they like, you know."

At eight o'clock Sir James insisted that the tea-things should be brought up, and left Aurora no peace till she had made the tea. "Fanny would want her tea—something might bring her home early, and she would be tired, and thirsty."

Accordingly the tea was made, and Sir James took his wonted seat at the table. Aurora filled him out his own favourite large breakfast-cup.

“ No, no ; not yet,” he said. “ I will wait for Fanny—I will wait for Fanny.” He seemed more and more nervous. “ We will have a fire too ; she may be cold.”

“ People are sometimes cold, certainly,” said Aurora, as she set a light to the fire, which was ready laid in the grate, for Sir James was very chilly. Then mopping her face with her pocket-handkerchief, she swallowed a scalding cup of tea, by way of inducing Sir James to do so likewise.

But he yielded neither to precept nor example ; he sat, stirring his tea round and round, but not tasting one drop of it.

He fancied that he recognised the sound of every carriage which rolled along the street. “ That’s it—there she is !” he called out, every instant. Then disappointed, he would say, gloomily, “ Why should I expect her ? She is amusing herself—she will not think of me ?”

“ It is only nine o’clock,” said Aurora ; and the clock struck in confirmation of her words. Sir James, however, protested that it was too slow, and should be set right. With trembling hands he endeavoured to remove the glass shade. Aurora ran to assist him, but,

unfortunately, she forgot, in her hurry, to put her eye-glass to her eye, so as usual, miscalculating the distance, she butted her head smash against it, and broke it to shivers.

“ Dear ! how awkward I am ! I’m so sorry ! ”

“ Never mind, there is plenty more glass to be had in the world,” said Sir James, soothingly.

“ Well, that’s true, I declare—you are so good-natured ; but I am very awkward, really. Do let me help you with the clock.”

She helped him so effectually, that between them they stopped it altogether.

This little episode was, however, so far advantageous, that it got over a little time, and somewhat diverted Sir James’s attention from the one subject which engrossed his mind. A heavy thunder-shower now began to fall ; but Sir James scarcely seemed to heed it. However, he heard the clock strike ten with tolerable equanimity ; but at the sound of eleven, all Aurora’s persuasive eloquence lost its effect. He rang the bell violently.

“ Is Lady Ramsay not come in ? ” he in-

quired, in a firm voice, of the servant. "Perhaps she went directly to her room. Go and see."

As soon as the man had shut the door, Sir James whispered to Aurora, "I wish you would go and look if he—Mr. Stanly—is yet returned."

Aurora stared in amazement at the sudden change of his manner. He had spoken to the servant in a stately, almost in a commanding tone; now his voice, indeed his whole frame, trembled.

But the good little soul did not stay to consider the point; she saw Sir James's uneasiness, and nobly repressing her curiosity as to its cause, she trotted off to obey his injunctions.

"Well?" he ejaculated, nervously, when he saw her return.

"Mr. Stanly is not come home," replied Aurora, mournfully. For instinct told her, that her news would be unwelcome.

The butler now came, with the information that the carriage had returned, without Lady Ramsay. The coachman thought, that wait-

ing any longer at the station was useless, since the last train had come in, and no more were expected till the early morning.

“Dear !” exclaimed Aurora, thunderstruck.

But Sir James expressed neither surprise nor annoyance, and it was with a firm, hard voice, that he gave the following orders :

“Tell the coachman to return instantly to the station, and wait my lady’s arrival. Some accident may have detained the train, or,” he added, recollecting himself, “I mean, another may be put on, unexpectedly. Lady Ramsay desired the coachman to wait till her return ; the coachman should do as he is told. She has always good reasons for the orders she gives.”

As soon as the butler had left the room, Sir James took a chair by the fire, and seated himself, bolt upright, in it.

“Won’t you go to bed ?” said Aurora, after a long silence.

“Not yet ; but you had better,” was his reply.

Without speaking, Aurora put a cushion behind Sir James’s back, and a footstool under his feet. He seemed unconscious of these at-

tentions, and sat in the same erect position, his eyes fixedly staring before him.

Aurora took a chair in the opposite corner of the fireplace, and, with her little eyes very wide open, sat looking hard at Sir James.

But, despite all her endeavours, her eyes would blink and shut, and she felt a terrible inclination to tumble down stairs, or to fling herself from some eminence, to the summit of which she had been unaccountably elevated. She gave two or three short grunts, and as many involuntary starts, and then, in despair, she groaned out, "Dear! I do so wonder how you can keep awake."

"Leave me alone," said Sir James. "I wish you would go to bed."

Poor little Aurora was too sleepy to observe the strange, hard tone in which he spoke, but no degree of drowsiness could check her kindly instincts. The foggy consciousness of his unhappiness sat upon her like a nightmare; she was dreamily curious as to its cause, and thought it very cross of him not to confide in her; still, pity was the predominant feeling, and come what might, she was determined not to leave him. She made a noble resolution

not to go to sleep any more. In furtherance of which, she fixed herself very firmly in her chair, with her feet on the bar, and her fingers through its arms, and stared fiercely at the fire.

These ingenious devices were not, however, attended with the success which they deserved. At the expiration of a very few seconds, Aurora again began to nod and to snort. Ever and anon her nose came unexpectedly in contact with her knees, but somehow it seemed quite natural, and did not surprise her at all.

This state of things must have lasted some time, for at length, suddenly roused by the sound of her own loud snoring, she perceived that the morning had already dawned. The fire was out, and she shivered with cold. After yawning, to the imminent risk of fracturing her jaws, after repeated stretchings of her little squat person, rubbings of her eyes, and scratchings of her nose, she was at length enabled, mistily, to see Sir James.

There he sat, exactly as when she had last looked at him, rigidly erect, his eyes glassy, and strained wide open. A bright fever-spot

was upon each cheek ; with this exception, his countenance was livid.

Little Aurora was so shocked at his appearance, that her usual ejaculation stuck fairly in her throat. Her “Dear !” was so very guttural as to be altogether inaudible. To make up for this failure, she bustled about the room, and, for once in her life, purposely knocked down various articles of furniture, in hopes of attracting his attention. But all her efforts were vain ; he sat motionless, without appearing to notice her.

After numerous unsuccessful attempts, and much clattering with the fire-irons, she at length produced not only smoke, but flame also. Delighted with so brilliant a result, she trotted off to the kitchen in search of something warm for Sir James. It was hardly light, and she had to grope her passage, at every step falling foul of frying-pans, tea-kettles, saucepans, and other culinary utensils. In time, however, she made way through the chaos, and pounced upon a coffee-pot, which, by some chance, had been left upon the dresser. Triumphantlly she returned to the drawing-

room with her prize, set it on the fire, and, flopping down on her knees before it, began puffing away with all her might.

Symptoms of ebullition presently manifested themselves; Aurora then poured some coffee into one of the teacups which had not been removed since the evening meal.

She went up to Sir James, and, holding the beverage just under his nose, "Now, dear Sir James, will you do me a favour?" she began, coaxingly. "Now, only to oblige me; if you *would* try just one mouthful of this nice coffee, I'm sure you would like it. I've been and fetched it, and warmed it, and all myself. It would do you so much good! and I should be so glad! Now do."

Unable to resist her kindness, he put the cup to his lips; then, shaking his head, he pushed it from him. "I can't—I can't. Take it away; don't tease me."

Aurora tried to console herself for this disappointment by drinking some of the "nice coffee" herself. She had great need of refreshment, but, instead of doing her good, the small quantity she got down nearly choked her. There was something in the expression

of Sir James's face which, as she emphatically explained herself, "pushed her heart quite up into her throat."

Presently sounds were heard in the house, doors were opened, window-shutters were unbarred; one of the housemaids looked into the drawing-room, but drew back quickly, on seeing Sir James.

Aurora spoke to him several times, but without receiving any answer. At last, he started suddenly to his feet. A carriage had stopped at the door.

Aurora made one bounce to the window. "It's Lady Ramsay—it is!" And she jumped for joy. "I see her, I do; and Mr. Stanly; all safe. They are coming up-stairs. Dear, how nice!"

"Go, and send Fanny here, *alone*."

The sepulchral voice in which Sir James spoke, sent a chill through Aurora's heart; but the joy at seeing Lady Ramsay safe soon dispelled it.

She met her on the first landing with the valuable information, "Do you know you have been out all night? It is six o'clock in the morning, and you are only just come home, and

I am so glad, you can't think; that is, very sorry, certainly; still, it is so lucky your having got home at last; for you have no idea of the way we have been in about you; I mean, Sir James. He would not eat his mullagatawny, nor drink his tea, nor go to bed, nor anything; it was terrible to see him, really; and I'm sure I did all I could to amuse him, though it was no use my trying; but he will be all right now you are come. But you must not be frightened if he looks ill, for he does look ill sometimes, you know; dear, how ill he did look to be sure!"

Thus laughing, and blubbering, and stumbling, and picking herself up again, good little Aurora preceded Lady Ramsay to the door of the drawing-room; Charles followed, and Mrs. Tyrrell brought up the rear. Aurora's hand was on the lock, when, suddenly recollecting Sir James's last word, she flushed scarlet, and jerked out in Lady Ramsay's ear, "He wants you *alone*."

The door opened, and Lady Ramsay stood before her husband.

She was going up to him in her usual affectionate manner, in order to explain the cause

of the delay, when something in the expression of his eye arrested her.

“ Good Heavens, Sir James !” she faltered out, “ what is the matter ?”

A deep blush overspread her face, as the thought of what might be passing in his mind, flashed through hers. “ Oh, Sir James !” she said, in supplicating tones. “ Dear Sir James, speak to me ; for God’s sake, speak !”

But he mistook her sorrow for contrition. The blood which anxiety and affection had sent into her cheek, spoke to him of guilty shame. The tension of his brain had lasted too long ; his nerves were strung too tightly. He stood before her tall, gaunt, inflexible. His lips moved, but no sound issued from them ; his upraised arm stiffened and fell powerless by his side ; his cheek was livid. His eyeballs rolled round and round, and then set for ever. He reeled backwards and forwards, like a tall tree struck by the axe, and fell with a crash upon the ground at Lady Ramsay’s feet.

Sir James Ramsay was dead.

CHAPTER X.

MAGNIFICENT as its owner was the establishment at Overdale. Everything about it was grand and massive, stately and solemn.

The castle was a huge, irregular pile of buildings, covering whole acres of ground. It contained many handsome and even convenient apartments; but these were scattered about in different wings, so that it was quite a journey to get from one to the other. Rooms had been added here and there, galleries attached on this side and on that, without reference to symmetry or appropriateness, but according to the will, or rather to the whim of its noble proprietors.

And a whimsical set they must have been, to judge, at least, by the strange architectural devices, in which, it would seem, their hearts

had delighted. Overdale Castle boasted several suites of awful state-rooms, connected by galleries, and passages, and corridors, long, drafty, and dark. In these lugubrious chambers, kings of various dynasties had been wearily entertained. The chairs in which they sat were still held sacred; the beds in which they reposed had never since been defiled by slumbers less august. Faded tapestry hangings had disfigured the walls for ages; and in comfortless keeping with these time-worn monstrosities, were sofas of incredible hardness, and chairs of fabulous stiffness, which, venerable with the dust of centuries, stood resolutely in the posts which they had held ever since their first occupation.

An atmosphere of solemn formality pervaded every part of the mansion. You were alarmed at the sound of your own voice; you started at the echo of your own footfall. Unconsciously you found yourself speaking in a whisper, and moving with caution, as if fearing to disturb the grizzly brave or the formal fair who frowned at you from their pondrous frames as you passed by. Of them were told many a dismal tale, many a fearful legend.

There was not a portrait without its dark history; not a room without its unearthly visitant. It was said that crimes of the deepest dye had been committed within these precincts; there, foul conspiracies had been plotted, direful revenge executed. There was no end to the stories of blood and murder, which were currently believed; and as for apparitions such as made the hair stand on end, these, if you listened to the servants, were things of every day's, or rather, of every night's occurrence.

But, independently of superstitious feelings, there was something chilling in the rigid formality of the most ordinary household arrangements. A gong, that might wake the dead, dispelled the morning slumbers. The dinner was announced by a bell, like a funeral toll; a curfew assembled the household to a formal prayer. Such had been, from time immemorial, the practice at Overdale, and of it the least infringement seemed like sacrilege.

This monotonous grandeur was not likely to raise the spirits; and Isabella's were already depressed. Moreover, any kind of pomp and ceremonial was repugnant to her nature.

Her tastes were refined and simple. She loved elegance, but not splendour; and the magnificence with which she was surrounded became daily more oppressive.

Poor Madame Rodostomus's spirits were considerably damped. The solemn dinners, especially, checked her loquacity. The massy plate, the tall footmen in gorgeous liveries, the awful silence, absolutely frightened the words out of her mouth.

Not so Chloe. Nothing could overcome her vivacity. Her spirits seemed, perhaps by contrast, wilder than ever. Her light step was heard in every part of the house, and her gay laugh resounded in gallery and corridor. It was her pleasure to dance along the passages, and to flit in and out of the great uninhabited rooms, like some light and fantastic spirit.

She overflowed with fun and mirth, but she was never boisterous or overpowering; she spoke in epigrammatic sallies, but she was never ill-natured. Her voice was clear, her laugh ringing, yet melodious. She was wholly unlike other girls of her age—she was at once more childish and more womanly.

She skipped and frolicked with the wanton playfulness of a kitten, and with the same quick, but soft and graceful, movements. At times there was about her something ethereal, almost approaching the supernatural ; she seemed to float along the earth, rather than tread upon it. At such moments, she might be compared to a fairy spirit riding a fleecy cloud, wafted hither and thither by the breeze. Her lips seemed formed for smiles and kisses, her eyes seemed made but to beam and sparkle. Yet occasionally, though at very rare intervals, the dark orbs would become suddenly overcast, and remain steeped in ominous gloom. But these fits were never of long duration. The darkness passed away like a summer cloud.

The strange fascination which she had possessed as a child, was now more powerful than ever. None could withstand its influence. Even the servants got over their prejudices against her queer foreign ways ; they were captivated, as by some magic charm. They vied with each other in anxiety to gratify her wishes, however fantastic or inconvenient these might be.

But if even the servants were subdued by the inexplicable charm that surrounded Chloe like the atmosphere of light, which some philosophers have ascribed to the sun, it is not surprising that Lord Overdale should become daily more fond of her. She devoted herself to pleasing him. She walked with him, rode with him, talked to him, and while she occupied his imagination, she satisfied his judgment, and filled his heart. He did not seek to resist her influence. Why should he? He believed that she would never exercise it unduly, and he believed that he had power to resist, should she attempt to do so. But though he knew himself tolerably, he was aware that he did not know Chloe at all; and this ignorance of her real disposition was, perhaps, one great reason of the charm which she had cast over him. His knowledge of human nature was extensive and various. He once believed he had scanned it in all its phases; but here was a girl, a mere child, who baffled all his penetration, and put his experience to shame. She was utterly different from any being he had ever seen. He could compare her with no standard, test her by no rule. Her words and actions

always took you by surprise, and it was impossible to foretel, or even to guess, what she next might say or do. Thus she engrossed his mind, and kept it continually occupied in unravelling her character. It was like working a rich mine, like navigating an unknown sea, like exploring a new world. Everything on this virgin soil was so fresh, so pure, so unsullied. She was so completely original, so free from any symptom of affectation, so thoroughly and entirely herself. Perhaps, after all, the strongest hold she had over Lord Overdale was through her innocent and intense enjoyment of life. It was not the thoughtless pleasure of a child, nor yet the reflective satisfaction of a grown person. It was at once spontaneous and voluntary. It was as a spring of living joy, an exuberant and inexhaustible vitality. Existence was for her, happiness. There was something in the absolute contrast of these feelings with his own, which attracted him as by a magical spell. He, to whom life had been a burden, or a bore, drew freshness and enjoyment from the superabundance of hers. She made him feel young—
—younger than he had felt even in early

youth. He regarded her as a thing not of this earth. She seemed to him an emanation from another planet, a spark from a distant sun, all floating in light and lightness. He could not consider her a heavy human thing; this airy spirit could not be treated as other earth-born creatures. For her he had another voice, a new language.

Like most men whose manner repels familiarity and inspires awe, Lord Overdale was particularly pleased with Chloe's fearless confidence in him. It was her custom to greet him in the morning with a song and a flower, generally a moss rose, his especial favourite. Then his austere countenance would almost smile, and, though his bearing was always stately, his fine eyes expressed a dignified fondness, which any one must feel proud of inspiring. He would call her "My blithe singing-bird," "My bright Ariel," "My fair Flora," "My sunbeam." These and a thousand other terms of endearment he had invented for her, and all were applicable and graceful.

Lord Overdale's affection and admiration did not, however, blind him to Chloe's faults.

He saw them plainly and painfully. He deplored her thoughtlessness, her want of perseverance. She had extraordinary quickness of apprehension and great desire for knowledge ; she learnt with incredible facility whatever captivated her imagination ; she mastered difficulties as by intuition ; but she seized an idea at once, or else never took the trouble of comprehending it. If Lord Overdale or Isabella attempted to explain anything towards which she did not feel attracted, she would yawn, plead a headache, throw aside her books, run, without bonnet or shawl, into the garden, and perhaps not return all day.

There was a pretty little room called the study, which Lord Overdale had fitted up expressly for Chloe's use. There were books, and pictures, and musical instruments ; in this room the sisters passed their morning.

Lord Overdale would generally look in to see what progress Chloe had made. He was often as amazed by her sudden advancement as by an unexpected and unaccountable flagging. She would often vault over real difficulties, and stop at imaginary ones. At one time she would comprehend an abstruse

meaning, seize an obscure passage at once ; at another, the most simple prose would puzzle her. She would execute incredible difficulties on the piano, but never those the composer had written. She would draw graceful and complicated groups, or beautiful landscapes, from memory or imagination ; but to copy or to sketch what was before her, seemed beyond her power.

Lord Overdale's admonitions produced little or no improvement. He could not be seriously angry with a creature of whom he was so fond, and who, he hoped, was becoming fond of him. Isabella often reproached herself for not endeavouring to undeceive him in this respect. Yet how could she ? Chloe had done so much to foster the illusion, it had laid such strong hold of Lord Overdale 'that Isabella felt it would be impossible for her to dispel it ; and Chloe was more than ever deaf to her sister's remonstrances on the subject.

Besides, Isabella had few opportunities of conversing with Lord Overdale. Once he had sounded her respecting the strange problem of Chloe's character, and she had sought to open his eyes with regard to the danger he was in-

cunning ; but he either did not, or would not understand her. Isabella could not, without encouragement, give advice which she plainly saw was not likely to be followed. She also dreaded to excite unpleasant feelings in him, on the eve of his nephew's arrival.

Charles might now be expected daily. Isabella had heard through Chloe of Lord Overdale's invitation to him, and Charles had written to inform her that he would, as soon as possible, profit by it. He told her that he was detained in London by the interview which Lady Ramsay had procured for him with Lord Derwent ; he told her how much he hoped from this interview, but he purposely avoided mentioning upon what day it was to take place. Without exactly saying so, he wrote in such a manner as should induce her to believe that it had not yet been specified. The letter was full of affectionate expressions ; he had never, perhaps, used so many or such strong ones ; yet, notwithstanding, there was something about it which dissatisfied and depressed her. This seemed very unreasonable. Isabella felt that it was so, but in vain did she

try to argue with herself. There are instincts truer than reason.

Neither Chloe's blind self-reliance, her incessant protestations that all would be well, nor Lord Overdale's cold courtesy, were calculated to reassure Isabella. The latter had shown her the note of apology he had received from his nephew. It was written with the same cautious uncertainty as that to Isabella. Charles was unavoidably and unexpectedly detained ; but an interview from such a quarter could not be refused, it would be the height of imprudence to do so ; he must wait the great man's pleasure. Isabella's voice trembled, as she, with thanks, returned the letter to Lord Overdale. She made no comment upon it, nor did he ; but the stern, almost sinister, expression of his countenance, as he glanced upon the concluding words of regret at the delay, and of rejoicing at the hope of a speedy meeting, did not augur favourably for the reconciliation between the uncle and nephew, upon which she felt so much depended.

One morning, after a restless night, in which her broken sleep had been disturbed

by painful dreams, Isabella went, as usual, early into the garden.

She walked for some time up and down the quaint, old-fashioned terraces, vainly striving to get her thoughts into order. Presently she took from her bosom Charles's last letter, and began reading it over. "Not coming yet!" she said to herself. "Was this delay so very necessary after four years' absence. The interview is an important one, no doubt; it may possibly influence his future career. Still, I do not like to see him so entirely absorbed by worldly prospects. Ambition, and ambition, and ambition. Oh, formerly it was not thus!"

Just then Chloe came tripping along the green alley which led from the house. "Good news, good news!" she called out from the distance, and held up a newspaper in her hand. "Did I not tell you that you would soon have good news? Look," she said, when she came up to her sister, "look here, Isabella! Charles is appointed attaché at Paris. Just what he wanted! It was worth while to be detained in London for that; and you were fancying all sorts of things, you foolish Isabella!"

However, I am glad that you can be foolish sometimes, as well as other people. If you were always wise, you might not have patience with poor little Chloe. Now own that, for once, I've been right, and you quite wrong. I'm so glad of it."

She threw her arms round her sister, and kissed her tenderly.

While Chloe was talking, Isabella had taken the paper, and was gazing intently upon the beloved name, seen for the first time in print. It ought to have given her pleasure. She wondered why it did not do so. Then she recollected how much rather she would have read his nomination in his own hand, and written to herself.

"But there may still be a letter," she said, in reply to her own thoughts—"do you know if there is a letter for me?"

"There is not," said Chloe, with a disappointed air. "But he will write to-morrow. I know he will."

Tears stood in Isabella's eyes. She turned away her head to conceal them.

"Hark! I hear the sound of wheels!" exclaimed Chloe, whose senses were marvellously

acute ; “but no—no, I am not sure,” she added, as she observed Isabella start, and change colour. “It is probably only the cart, returned from the farm. It was sent there this morning, I know.” She drew her arm round Isabella, and took her hand. “I am sure it is only the cart,” she resumed, for she felt that Isabella was trembling from head to foot. “Let us sit down, dear sister.”

They seated themselves upon a bench, and listened intently. The sounds approached. They were not such as the wheels of a cart would have produced. It was evidently a carriage, and driving up the avenue.

The carriage presently became visible. Chloe perceived it first, but she made no observation. It stopped before the door. A gentleman got out. “It is not he,” said Isabella, sorrowfully.

“Can you tell at that distance?” exclaimed Chloe, with surprise, for she was in general much farther-sighted than her sister, and she had not been able to distinguish the stranger. A deep crimson spread itself over Isabella’s features. “You look so pretty. I wish he

could see you at this moment!" said Chloe, affectionately.

"I was told that the sisters were in the garden. May I disturb their tête-à-tête?" said a well-known voice. But it was not Charles Stanly's. "Do I take you by surprise?" he added, as both remained silent.

"Indeed you do," replied Chloe; "Lord Overdale did not tell us when you were coming. But welcome, welcome to Overdale, Mr. Tyrrell," she proceeded, extending her hand, playfully. Then, in order to give Isabella time to recover from her agitation, she went on—"We will do all, by way of entertaining you, that state and solemnity can do. I cannot say that we are lively, but we are grand and majestic—somebody gave that as a definition of the sublime—therefore, uncontrovertibly, we are sublime."

"How glad I am to see you, dear Frank," said Isabella, speaking with evident effort. "But do you know, I am grown so nervous, that your sudden arrival quite frightened me."

"Nervous, Isabella! You nervous!"

“ You may well be surprised,” said Chloe, who saw that Frank’s observation was painful to her sister. “ The fact is, that Isabella’s nerves have never yet recovered from the fatigue she underwent while mamma was ill. She nursed her, night and day, for several weeks, and felt none the worse at the time ; but such over-exertion must tell sooner or later.”

“ Oh, Chloe, you exaggerate. You forget that you took your regular turns of watching by mamma’s bed.”

“ My watching went for very little. I’m a wretched nurse. I’ve no patience ; I get low-spirited, and good for nothing. Now, Isabella was continually cheerful ; all the time mamma was ill, her energies never flagged for a moment.”

“ As long as there is something to be done, Isabella will always find strength to do it,” said Frank, heartily.

“ And what news from London ?” inquired Chloe.

“ The best news, I see you have learnt already,” Frank replied, as he pointed to the newspaper, which Isabella still held. “ Charles

will write to-morrow, and fix the day of his arrival. He will be here very soon."

"Really coming!" exclaimed Isabella, as a joyful ray beamed in her eyes. "But no, till I see him, I will not—I must not believe it." And she sighed as she spoke.

A compression of Frank's under lip, and a slight shade of additional paleness, were the only visible inclinations of his feelings. Isabella marked them, and said gently:

"His arrival has been so often deferred, that I had almost begun to fancy he was not coming at all." She tried to speak with unconcern.

"But what detains him now?" inquired Chloe, thoughtlessly. "Why did he not come with you?"

Frank looked confused, as he replied: "He told me of an engagement, I hardly knew what, which he made before his nomination, and could not well break afterwards. I fancy he did not think he would be appointed so soon, and therefore——"

"Had we not better go in and look for Lord Overdale?" said Chloe, quickly. She saw that her sister was made uneasy by

Frank's obvious perplexity. She led the way to the house.

Crossing the entrance-hall, hung with rusty armour, they passed through a long suite of rooms, until they reached an apartment, of which the large dimensions were magnified by the prevailing duskiness. Its walls were of carved oak, it was exceedingly lofty, and dimly lighted from the top. Notwithstanding that the weather was warm, a chilly atmosphere pervaded this most gloomy chamber.

In the middle was a table, laid for four persons. It was a large one; but compared with the size of the room it appeared ridiculously small. A breakfast service of massive gold was upon it, and six servants, in gorgeous liveries, stood round it.

Lord Overdale paced the room backwards and forwards. He seemed absorbed in thought. At first he did not perceive the entrance of the party; but Chloe's light step soon roused his attention, and smiling to her, he advanced to meet the others, with his usual air of frigid urbanity.

Frank felt so chilled, that he was absolutely astonished to see Chloe dance blithely up to

Lord Overdale, and playfully fasten in his button-hole a rose, which she had gathered in the garden ; all the time singing a gay song.

“My bright Flora !” was all Lord Overdale said ; but his austere countenance relaxed, and he smiled fondly at her as he placed himself in a position convenient for Chloe’s purpose. Then, with a stately bow to Isabella and Frank, he motioned them to the table, and seated himself at its head.

Breakfast was nearly over, when Madame Rodostomus’s voice was heard in the distance :

“Bless me ! who would have thought it ? but it is always the case, and really it is not my fault if I am late ; it was my watch that stopped—my watches always *will* stop, and it is a curious thing that nobody else’s watches stop in the way mine do—always just at the very time, which I never could account for ; but it’s all my luck ; if watches *will* stop, all the intentions in the world will not make them go ; but bless me ! what wonderful things happen in this world ! Only fancy Mr. Tyrrell at Overdale ! Mr. Tyrrell, I am very happy to see you, I’m sure, and so is my lord.” And the widow, seating herself oppo-

site to Lord Overdale, began grinning and wriggling, and doing the honours of the breakfast-table, as if she had been mistress of the house.

Lord Overdale let her have her way for a few minutes. He then rose, and saying to Frank, as he passed by him, "I shall be glad to see you, presently, in my study," he left the room.

"What a dear kind gentleman he is!" exclaimed Madame Rodostomus, long before he was beyond hearing, "and though I say it, who shouldn't say it, there is not his like to be found among men or husbands, which, to be sure, I've had experience enough of, and though it may be absurd, I really can't help it; I am proud of such a man, so clever, so agreeable, so affectionate, so—everything."

Tears of rapture stood in the old lady's eyes as she pronounced these last touching words. As soon as she was tolerably composed, she went on: "I suppose you are come upon business, Mr. Tyrrell? Oh, I ask no questions—that would be premature and indelicate, of course; situated as I am, a widow and a mother, and—" a bride, she was going to say,

but stopped just in time; “but never mind—for I must say it is altogether a most extraordinary affair; but things happen to me which never happen to anybody else, and the longer I live, the more I am convinced that I certainly am a very remarkable person.”

The widow having finished her harangue and her breakfast, Frank went to join Lord Overdale. Isabella and Chloe retired, as usual, to the boudoir.

“Now, I am going to be a very good girl this morning,” said Chloe, as she seated herself at the table. “Not that I am in a studious humour, but I see that you, Isabella, are in a sad one; and I want to surprise you with my progress, and make you laugh.”

“That is my good little Chloe,” Isabella replied, fondly.

“Yes, you shall see that I can be good sometimes; and since I have been here, I see that you can be naughty sometimes, which I am glad of, in some respects. Yet, dear sister,” she added, suddenly changing her childish tone to one of feeling, “I wish I could see you look as you used to do; and now that we

know he is really coming, I cannot imagine why you are still melancholy."

"I have not your elasticity of spirits. Mine have been too long depressed to rise easily. I sometimes think they never will regain their original tone," she added, with a sigh.

"Nonsense, sister! You must not give way to such fancies. I tell you, that your spirits will rise higher than ever, when somebody comes. His long absence will only enhance your pleasure at meeting."

"I wish it may be so," replied Isabella, trying to force a smile; "and it is wrong of me to yield as I do to superstitious fears and presentiments; but do you know, Chloe, I cannot get Larochefoucauld's ill-omened words out of my head. Do you remember them? '*Les choses les plus désirées n'arrivent jamais, on si elles arrivent, ci n'est ni dans le temps, ni dans les circonstances où elles auraient fait un extrême plaisir.*'"

"The sentence is neatly turned, but I don't believe it, for all that; and what is more, I *won't* believe it," she added, impetuously. "There! I have made you smile at last. That is just what I wanted. Now read, Isabella; I am going to draw."

At the end of about two hours, Frank came into the boudoir, and asked if he might speak with Isabella in private.

"Oh yes!" replied Chloe, pushing away her drawing with evident satisfaction. "You may talk to Isabella as long as you please. I've been a good girl, and been drawing like any angel, and am quite weary of sitting in the same spot. So good-by, for the present," she added, kissing Isabella; and, with a low, graceful curtsy to Frank, she left the room.

"Dear Chloe!" sighed Isabella.

But Frank did not heed her. He was trying to put what he had to say into the words most agreeable to Isabella, and least painful to himself.

"I come, at Lord Overdale's request, to make you a proposal, which, if approved by you, shall be submitted to Charles Stanly. Here is the draft I have just written, according to his dictation."

Isabella took the paper, and read it attentively. It was a settlement upon Charles Stanly of 1000*l.* a year during Lord Overdale's life, and liable to revocation at his pleasure.

“I have other instructions respecting his will,” proceeded Frank; “but these he wishes kept secret. Nor could the knowledge of them in any way affect your present decision. If, after a day or two’s consideration you are satisfied with this provision, I am empowered to write or speak to Stanly upon the subject.”

“Satisfied!” said Isabella. “Oh, more than satisfied. It far exceeds my expectations.”

Frank marked Isabella’s countenance as she spoke. Instead of the joy he expected and dreaded, her expression was melancholy and her tone sad. Then, to his own surprise, he was able to say, with tolerable cheerfulness, “I congratulate you, Isabella; I most sincerely congratulate you upon your good fortune. May you be as happy as you deserve.” He spoke these last words without looking at her; then he rose abruptly, and walked to the window.

But Isabella did not perceive his agitation. She was absorbed in her own thoughts. So deeply did they engross her, that she said, half aloud, and quite unconsciously, “Why—oh why, am I not happier?”

Had she seen Frank's face, she must have been struck by the peculiar expression of his countenance as he heard her. But his back was turned, and he remained thus for some moments.

When he again turned towards her, his countenance was grave and composed. "You understand," he said, "that this settlement is, at present, only conditional, and only to be ratified, if it so please Lord Overdale, after he has seen his nephew."

"Of course, I understand that; but tell me——" She paused, hesitating.

Isabella longed to question Frank respecting Charles. She had a thousand inquiries to make as to his opinions, his habits, his looks, but an inexplicable feeling kept her silent. She tried to believe that she was fearful of annoying Frank. And so she was; but there was more behind, which she did not, or would not, explain to herself. She went on speaking:

"Assure Lord Overdale of my gratitude. You will do it better than I can. There is a certain restraint between him and me, natural enough under the circumstances, which prevents me from feeling at ease with him. And

tell him, also, that I require no time for consideration. I am entirely satisfied."

But caution was one of Lord Overdale's characteristics, and he chose to wait some days before he allowed Frank to submit his proposal to Charles. Early on the morning of the third day, Frank, according to appointment, entered Lord Overdale's study, and placed before him a letter to Charles, which he had just written.

"It will do well," said Lord Overdale, when he had finished reading it. "The wording is exactly as it should be, putting the transaction in an official light. I do not wish it to be considered as an atonement, or even a concession, but as a gift; to which I am prompted, not because Charles Stanly is my nephew, or because I have any reason to think favourably of him, but because I wish to benefit Miss Romaine, of whose good qualities I have conceived a high opinion."

"And of which she is, indeed, most deserving," said Frank, with enthusiasm.

"You have known her long, I believe?"

"Ever since her infancy."

"While in Italy, I had various opportunities

of judging her character. It is a remarkable one. But how came she to attach herself as she has done?"

Frank's countenance fell. "There is no accounting for such things," he replied.

The unmistakable candour of Frank's expression and manner at once inspired trust. Even Lord Overdale, suspicious by nature and by circumstances, was swayed by it, and he said, in a tone of confidence very unusual to him :

"I may as well tell you, Mr. Tyrrell, that it is vain to expect any feeling of cordiality ever to exist between me and Charles Stanly. The ties of blood cannot influence me, nor has his conduct been such as in any way to lessen the prejudice which I admit I have conceived against him. You would understand my feelings better if you knew the circumstances of my early life. These are known to none but myself. The world judges me harshly, but I care not for the world's opinion. Suffice it that I have reasons, and strong ones, for acting as I have done. My intention, at one time, was to endeavour to break the entail of the Overdale property; but circumstances have occurred, which induce me to alter my

mind. At least, I shall not, immediately, take any steps for that purpose. On Miss Romaine's account, I have consented to receive Charles Stanly as my nephew, and probably to settle an annuity upon him; but let it be clearly understood that I do so, not for his sake, but solely for hers."

Frank bowed acquiescence. He was at a loss how to express himself. He felt that this was the moment to place some words in Charles's favour, for he saw that Lord Overdale was favourably disposed towards himself, and inclined to put trust in his opinions. He owed it to friendship, and to justice, to speak as well of Charles as he could. There was so much good in Charles, it should be put in the best point of view, and urged forcibly; yet, somehow, Frank's words failed him, and he remained silent.

Lord Overdale proceeded: "For form's sake only, I have made the settlement conditional. Acquaintance will not alter my opinion of my nephew. I know his character well—it is exactly his father's. He is weak, vain, and unstable. Such a disposition I at once detest and despise."

The vehemence of this denuuciation roused Frank's generosity. "Pardon me," he said, with warmth. "I once thought as you do; but I wronged him. The constancy of his attachment to Miss Romaine, proves him, at least, not unstable. He is no ordinary man who can so well appreciate such excellence." For a moment, and for a moment only, Lord Overdale's piercing eye rested upon Frank. Frank felt at once that his inmost feelings were clear to Lord Overdale. This conviction heightened the agitation, which all his self-command was unable to quell. However, by a strong effort, he forced himself to say, with tolerable composure: "Charles Stanly's conduct at St. Petersburg has been highly approved of. In more than one instance, he has acted with promptitude and intelligence. His diplomatic career has, I hope, brought out his character, and given it the stability it before wanted. And whatever may be his faults, they are, believe me, more of the head than of the heart."

Again Lord Overdale's eye was turned upon Frank. But not with the keen expression it had worn before. What the look meant,

Frank was at a loss to explain ; in any other man, he would have called it benevolence.

Jones entered with the letter-bag. In an instant, the peer's countenance was fixed and austere. He opened the bag deliberately, and took from it newspapers and letters.

He handed one to Frank. It was from Charles. Frank opened it, and turned as pale as ashes. He rose to go ; but when he reached the door, he stopped, and stood for a moment, as if hesitating what he should do. Then he walked back to the table, and putting his letter open before Lord Overdale, left the room without speaking.

CHAPTER XI.

No pen can describe the consternation which reigned in Belgrave-square. Lady Ramsay was so paralysed with horror, that for some moments after Sir James fell down at her feet, she could not believe that he was really dead. She knelt beside him and spoke to him, as if he could hear and answer her; but the fixed eyes, and the dropped jaw, at length convinced her of the awful truth; then she uttered a scream so piercing as to alarm the whole house. Charles and Aurora arrived first, and found her stretched upon the floor, black in the face, and scarcely more alive than the corpse beside which she lay. The shock had brought on a sort of convulsion, succeeded by insensibility.

Mrs. Tyrrell and all the servants crowded

into the room. It was a terrible scene of confusion. Everybody bewailed, and moaned, and wondered, and suggested, but nobody did anything, or indeed knew what to do. They rushed frantically from place to place, bewildering and hindering each other. Charles stood transfixed with horror. Aurora ran about, knocking against everything and everybody, kissing Sir James's cold hands, then hanging over Lady Ramsay, so as almost to smother her, and ejaculating, "Dear! dear!" in a most piteous and heartrending manner.

Strange to say, Mrs. Tyrrell was the most collected person present. This childish, helpless being suddenly became sensible and efficient. The loss of one daughter, and the despair of the other, had roused the mother within her, and animated her latent energies. She no longer lisped and wondered; she acted and ordered. In a voice, which at another moment she would have condemned as vulgarly loud, she gave judicious orders to the servants. A doctor was sent for, and restoratives procured. Meanwhile, she had herself unfastened Lady Ramsay's

dress, and cut her laces. Before animation returned, Mrs. Tyrrell had her daughter carried up-stairs, and thus spared the misery of again beholding her dead husband.

Charles was amazed at these proofs of sense and activity on the part of one whom he had always believed incapable of either. He little knew what miracles love can work ; even now, he was far from ascribing these efforts to their true cause. Mrs. Tyrrell's energy, however, roused his own ; it enabled him to conquer the vague horror which had, at first, taken possession of him.

The doctor soon arrived. One glance at poor Sir James sufficed to show that he was beyond all human aid. But his attendance was required for Lady Ramsay. She was in a high fever, and delirious.

She raved more and more wildly. Her self-upbraidings were fearful. She styled herself a monster, a murderess. She had killed her husband, the only human being who really loved her. She called loudly for death. That alone could put a stop to her agony ; but no, no ; she should not be allowed to die ; she did

not yet deserve to be released from bondage ; she should have to live, and suffer, and make atonement for her sins.

Thus she raved for many hours. Presently she began to talk of Charles Stanly, in a strange, mysterious way. As soon as she heard his name, Mrs. Tyrrell dismissed the female attendant who was watching with her. At another moment, the bare idea of being alone with a delirious person would have killed her with fright ; but in the present case, she felt not the slightest alarm.

It was near morning before the fever began to subside. At length the sedative seemed to take effect. Lady Ramsay became gradually more calm, and sank into a deep sleep. Mrs. Tyrrell watched by her side, unconscious of fatigue or drowsiness.

When Lady Ramsay woke, her eye fell upon her mother's anxious face. In silence Mrs. Tyrrell extended her arms. " Oh, mother, mother !" said Lady Ramsay, faintly, as she threw herself into them.

" My poor, poor Fanny !" Mrs. Tyrrell said no more, but held her daughter tightly embraced.

After a while she whispered softly : “ You will exert yourself for my sake—I know you will ; you would not have me lose two daughters.”

Recollection now began to dawn in Lady Ramsay’s mind. Mrs. Tyrrell’s gentle kindness made her heart overflow. She wept long and bitterly.

Gradually, all that had passed came again before her ; Mrs. Tyrrell felt her shudder as she tremulously murmured : “ Tell me, mother, have I not been delirious ?”

“ I was alone with you, my child.”

Then, as if suddenly aware that Lady Ramsay’s impetuous embrace had disarranged her dress, she pretended to be exceedingly engrossed in smoothing it. In doing so, she sily pulled a comb out of her hair that she might be obliged to replace it, and thus escape noticing her daughter’s extraordinary agitation. She allowed some minutes to elapse, and then said, in a whisper, “ Do you know that you raved a great deal about Miss Romaine ? You repeated several times that you wished she was here !”

“ Did I ?” exclaimed Lady Ramsay, inex-

pressibly relieved, and yet at the same time half disappointed. "Did I really say so?" she added, after a pause.

"That was a good thought—a happy inspiration," said Mrs. Tyrrell, evading the direct answer. "She was *his* favourite. Poor Sir James was so fond of her."

Lady Ramsay started up in bed and seized her mother's hand.

"Do not be so violent; see how you crumple my sleeves." She pretended to be busily rearranging them. "Poor Sir James—she was his favourite." Mrs. Tyrrell, as she spoke, still continued looking at her dress, as if much more anxious about it than about her daughter.

"I see what you mean, dear mother," said Lady Ramsay, feebly, and replacing her head upon the pillow—"I see what you mean, and I will think of it, but I am not able for more now."

She turned to the other side, closed her eyes, and tried to sleep. But horrible visions filled her brain. She saw her dead husband, clearly and distinctly, as he had stood before her, with his upraised hand, and his mouth opened to utter—she dared not think what.

She saw the tall, gaunt, yet noble figure, rock backwards and forwards with that look—that fearful look! She should never forget it! Oh, the meaning, the dreadful meaning of that eye that used to beam upon her so fondly! In vain she tried to exclude this awful vision. She tried to think of her mother's kindness, of her considerateness, of her delicacy of feeling; then the question suggested itself, had she really spoken of Isabella? if she had, a superior and holy power must have inspired the words.

There was something in this thought that was soothing to Lady Ramsay. Presently her ideas became more vague, and at length she fell asleep. But her slumber soon became restless; she moaned and sobbed. Broken words escaped her.

Mrs. Tyrrell leant anxiously over her daughter, hesitating whether she should waken her or not. Such uneasy sleep could do no good; yet what dream could be so horrible as reality?

While thus uncertain, she saw a gradual change come over Lady Ramsay's countenance. Her features became composed, and

a smile of peace played upon her lips. She opened her eyes. "Dear mother!" she softly murmured.

"I have had such a dream!" she resumed, after a pause—"oh, such a blessed dream! He was going to curse me, and she, Isabella, interceded, and he blessed me instead. He looked at me with his old look of affection, called me Fanny, and blessed me! Give me a pen and paper; I will write immediately. Thanks for the suggestion—a thousand thanks!"

Lady Ramsay wrote the following letter:

"If I have been unkind and unjust, forgive me, Isabella! I am miserable—deservedly miserable, but you are generous, and will forgive me. God pardons a repentant sinner. He who loved you so well is dead—dead, and I am alone in the world. None care for me now as he did; there are none to whose happiness I am necessary. Life is a burden to me, and I long to die. But I have yet one mission on earth—I would fulfil it before I go hence. I would fain join the hands of him whom I regard as a son, and of her whom he loved as a daughter. Come to me, Isabella; come

and be my anchor of hope, my angel of consolation. You would come if you knew how eagerly I desire it. Come for his sake who loved us both. Before his remains are consigned to earth, let me see you and Charles Stanly together; let me bless an union which, I hope, will soon confer happiness upon you. You both deserve to be happy. When this is done, I feel as if my soul might be released, and I might die happy; but now, it is as if some fearful spell held me bound down here. My mother or Aurora will write all details; I cannot. I can only add, Come, in the name of God, I implore you—come.

“FANNY RAMSAY.”

Just as Lady Ramsay had finished writing, the door burst open, and little Aurora bundled in. Her eyelids, and indeed her whole face, was swollen with weeping. Her eyes were red, her nose still redder, and the rest of her face looked puffy and lumpy, and of the colour and consistency of ill-raised dough.

“Dear!” she exclaimed, “I’m so sorry; but I’ve only just heard of it, so I could not help it, certainly; but it’s a great pity Mrs.

Tyrrell's sitting up. I would not have gone to bed, only really I was so overcome with sleep, that I could not keep my eyes open; but it would not have signified my being sleepy if I had only known of dear Mrs. Tyrrell, who is so delicate and can't stand fatigue, and it was so selfish my going to sleep, and not thinking about her, though I'm sure I cried my eyes out almost thinking about"—here her sobs nearly choked her—"but it can't be helped, and it's no use talking or thinking now; so I've just come to insist upon it, that Mrs. Tyrrell shall go to bed, and let me stay with dear Lady Ramsay. I'm not the least sleepy now, and feel quite well and comfortable—almost." With these words, the kind little soul threw her arms round Lady Ramsay, and having nearly stifled her in the exuberance of her affection, performed the same kind office for Mrs. Tyrrell, to the no slight discomfiture of the latter, whose horror of vulgarity suddenly revived. She left the room, smoothing her hair in real earnest, and putting her sleeves in order.

Lady Ramsay now told Aurora that she had written to ask Miss Romaine to come to her,

that she might unite her and Charles Stanly. "It is what *he* would have wished me to do," said Lady Ramsay, in conclusion; "and to fulfil his wishes, is now my only pleasure on earth. Will you add a few lines of explanation? I am not, at present, equal to the effort."

Aurora stared at Lady Ramsay with a look of stupendous admiration, which at any other time would have been very ludicrous, but which (so much do circumstances alter facts) was now inexpressibly touching.

"Well!" exclaimed her little friend, "it is astonishing how good you are, certainly; but you are quite right, dear Lady Ramsay, quite; and I'm sure he would think so, poor dear, if he could see us"—a violent sob interrupted her utterance—"I wish he could, I'm sure; and there is no knowing, you know, we are such poor blind creatures, that we can't see excepting with our eyes; so he may be looking at us after all;" and Aurora tried to cast her little eyes upwards. "I'm sure," she added, gulping down a sigh, "I did nothing but look and stare at him all day yesterday; and when he would not eat his mul—mula,"—she stopped,

nearly choked at this dreadful recollection. She made several desperate endeavours to articulate the melancholy word mullagatawny, but there was something to her mind so peculiarly painful in its sound, that after innumerable failures, she gave up the attempt, and determined to use the monosyllable, soup, instead. "When I found that he would not eat his soup, I saw that something was wrong; oh, very wrong, but I had no idea what was going to happen — oh, dear, dear!" She stopped, half choked, gasping piteously.

After rubbing her eyes nearly out of her head, and half blowing off her nose, Aurora was sufficiently restored to write the following composition to Isabella:

"DEAR MISS ROMAYNE,

"I wish I might call you Isabella, but I can't venture to take such a liberty even at present when I am so unhappy, and so will you be too, when I tell you what has happened here. Poor Sir James is dead, and death is such a sad thing, because there is nothing at all to be done for it, you know. But of all kinds of deaths, a sudden death is most shock-

ing, because when one is so taken by surprise, one can't be prepared ; not that one ever is, after all. It was so horrible ; Lady Ramsay's coming home, and his falling down dead at her feet, and not even saying one word to her. But I must tell you how it was. They all went a large party to Richmond, and I stayed, because Sir James was not well, and would not go, but I had no idea there was anything serious the matter with him, nor had Lady Ramsay, or she would not have left him, of course. But we are blind creatures, and can't foresee what we do not know, so she went to Richmond, and I had a difficult task to amuse poor Sir James, and I thought he was cross, when in fact, he was ill, poor dear ; and I'm sure it was very wrong my not finding it out, and I shall never forgive myself, but it's no use regretting now. And the worst was, and there never was anything so unfortunate, certainly, that Lady Ramsay and Mr. Stanly got into a wrong train, and found themselves at Windsor instead of London ; so poor Sir James, when he found they did not come back, got into such a way, you never saw anything like it, and I'm sure I was nearly beside

myself with fright. I thought when they did not come back all night, that something had gone wrong, but I could not guess what, of course, and I kept telling him so, but he would not be comforted. And to add to it all, dear Arethusa has ran away, and Mrs. Tyrrell is afraid it is not with Lord John, but with Mr. Preston. So she ran after Lady Ramsay, thinking she was Arethusa, and went to Windsor too; and they none of them got home till next morning. And when Sir James heard the carriage stop at the door, he started up like a madman; and I went to tell Lady Ramsay, and she flew to him, but he fell down quite dead, and never heard the reason why she did not come back, which I believe was what killed him, for he fancied all sorts of things, at least I think so; but as he did not tell me, I can't be sure, of course. Now, is it not shocking all this having happened? So I'm sure you won't mind coming to Lady Ramsay at Eastrow, where we go soon for the funeral, which is to be performed by Mr. Smith, our new rector. It will be very melancholy, of course, but it will be such a comfort to Lady Ramsay seeing you, that as you are

so good, you will not mind it very much, I dare say. I would write more, but my eyes are quite shut up with crying, and I can't see, hardly, so you must excuse me this time.

“ Ever yours sincerely,

“ AURORA FOSTER.”

Charles Stanly was not the least unhappy among the inmates of the house of mourning. It was on this very day that he was to have set off for Overdale ; but to do so, after what had happened, was out of the question. It would be barbarous to leave Lady Ramsay in her present distress ; besides, as Frank was absent, there was no one but himself to give the necessary directions respecting the removal of the body to Eastrow, and the funeral, which Lady Ramsay chose should take place there. She was fond of pomp and ceremonial, and she wished Sir James's obsequies to be conducted with all possible magnificence. She called this paying proper respect to the dead ; other people might consider it ostentation, and think that the money thus spent, might have been better bestowed in charity to the living ; but there are two names to every-

thing; choose your word, and you have a virtue, or a vice, according to taste.

Upon Charles, too, devolved the task of tracing Arethusa. It was a very difficult one, for she had taken her measures so well, that not the least clue could be discovered regarding which route she had taken. Mrs. Tyrrell seemed to be active in proportion to her former laziness. She walked about London all alone, regardless of vulgarity. People might wonder if they pleased, they might say of her what they chose, it was all one to her now.

But even if Charles had not had these duties to perform in London, he would not have ventured to appear in his uncle's presence, before the circumstances relating to Sir James's death had been explained to him. There was a great awkwardness about the whole business; and though he was really in nowise to blame, still he could not help reflecting, that if he had taken Frank's advice, and gone at once to Overdale, without waiting for the luckless Richmond party, this terrible calamity would, in all probability, never have happened. He was also not a little uneasy as to what inferences Isabella might draw

from his conduct. His self-reproaches made him dread her accusation. Notwithstanding much sophistry on his part, his conscience told him, that he had acted towards her in a thoughtless and indifferent manner.

After much deliberation, Charles thought that the most prudent course he could pursue, was to write at once, and unreservedly, to Frank Tyrrell. Frank had influence both with Lord Overdale and with Isabella. The best plan to propitiate Frank in his favour, would be to speak plain truth, owning himself to blame, and throwing himself upon his mercy. Accordingly he wrote thus :

“ DEAR TYRRELL,

“ If I had followed your advice, I should have been the happiest, instead of the most miserable fellow living. Would to Heaven I had done as you told me, and gone at once to Overdale ; however, regrets are vain, and self-upbraidings unmanly.”

He then proceeded to relate the story as briefly and as simply as he could. He also mentioned Arethusa's flight, and with a pass-

ing comment upon Mrs. Tyrrell's unexpected energy, he concluded thus :

“ I need not say, that to leave Lady Ramsay under her present distressing circumstances, is quite out of the question. I may probably precede her to Eastrow, to make preparations for the funeral, which is to take place there. You will, of course, attend it.

“ Now, my dear fellow, I depend upon you for excusing me to my uncle. I would write to him myself, but have no heart to do so. I had rather solely confide in your friendship. I cannot be in better hands. My uncle knows you, and trusts you.

“ There is also another mission, which I would beg you to undertake ; I cannot do it, I cannot write to Isabella. I have too much to tell, my feelings are too strong for words. What I would say, I cannot say as I would. Say it for me, my dear fellow, or show her this letter. It will best explain the painful situation in which I am placed.”

It may seem strange that Charles did not prefer writing to Isabella himself, but it

must be remembered that conscience makes cowards, and that his might possibly not be so clear as it ought to have been. He had, indeed, begun more than one letter to her; but after spoiling several sheets of paper, he gave up the attempt. Somehow, he could not tell her the plain facts, as he could tell them to Frank; he felt that more would be required of him. To any other person he would have made up a capital story, of which himself should have been the hero. He would not have rejected embellishment, or perhaps, invention; had he been dealing with another woman, he would have called this cleverness and tact; but towards her, he felt that it would be deceit. There was something in the simple sincerity, the spotless purity of Isabella's character, which repelled any approach to falsehood. He could not, as to Frank, tell a half truth. To her he must tell all or nothing. He thought that it was because he loved her so well, that he would not attempt to deceive her; thus he marvelled much at the elevated nature of his attachment.

But the real marvel was the exalted beauty of a character, before which all things mean

or false fled and vanished. Charles blushed at the bare idea of writing a word, which might suggest an untrue conclusion. He was provoked at his own stupidity, and annoyed at discovering how much he stood in awe of Isabella. Till now, he had had no idea how greatly he dreaded losing her esteem. This again, he argued, was a proof of his extreme attachment. And there is no doubt but that he was much attached to her, notwithstanding the pains he took to tell himself so. Yet, how came it that he had not courage, or, to speak more correctly, not love enough to own his faults openly? A candid avowal disarms reproof, and ensures forgiveness. Real love is as confiding as it is indulgent. It pardons everything but want of trust in its generosity, that is to say, want of belief in itself.

He was not aware of Lady Ramsay's invitation to Isabella, for Lady Ramsay, in the excess of her grief, had refused to see Charles, and only communicated with him in writing. She wrote elaborate notes concerning the melancholy pomp on which she had set her heart, but dropped no word upon any other subject.

None but her mother and Aurora knew that Isabella was expected at Eastrow ; Lady Ramsay had begged them not to mention the invitation to Charles for fear of disappointing him, in case she should be unable to comply with it. This was the reason she gave them, and which she believed to be the true one, but, in fact, she was chiefly influenced, though secretly, by her natural love of representation, and her grand point was to get up an effective *coup de théâtre*.

Charles was, accordingly, very miserable, and thought himself exceedingly ill-used, when, on arriving at Eastrow, whither, at her desire, he had preceded Lady Ramsay, he found no letter from Isabella. But what he chose to call shameful neglect on her part, so far gratified him by justifying his own. He contrived to persuade himself that his remaining in London was no fault of his, but of hers ; in short, he presently arrived at the conclusion that he had acted nobly throughout, and that she alone had been to blame.

By what arguments he attained this comfortable conviction, it would be vain to reca-

pitulate. We must all remember how often we have used similar devices for similar ends. We must all be aware of the paltry excuses which we have dignified by the title of reasons, and applied to the justification of our own actions; whereas, with regard to those of others, we have adopted a process directly contrary. If we have any honesty, we will understand poor Charles's want of it.

Thus Charles, in all insincere sincerity, believed himself the aggrieved party. In his waking dreams he accused Isabella of fickleness and indifference; but in sleep Truth asserted her rights: then Isabella was an injured angel, and he was kneeling for pardon at her feet.

Minute and multifarious were the directions which Lady Ramsay had given him. He was himself to superintend all the necessary preparations, and see that everything was right.

It was not till the morning of the third day after his arrival at Eastrow, that a letter was put into his hands. He recognised the super-

scription, and eagerly tore it open. It was, indeed, from Isabella.

For some moments his agitation was too great to read it; then he read, but without understanding a word. However, at the second perusal his cheek flushed with pleasure, and he uttered an exclamation of joy. The letter was as follows :

“ Why did you not write to me yourself, dear Charles? I cannot understand your apprehensions. You should have known me better.

“ Lady Ramsay has, no doubt, told you that she has asked me to meet you at Eastrow. I shall be there soon after you receive this letter. I am only waiting for news of Lady Ramsay’s arrival. I expected her to leave London sooner, or should have written to you before. Frank is now in town, endeavouring to trace Miss Tyrrell, but he will return here, and fetch me.

“ As the prospect of meeting draws near, written words become more and more unsatisfactory, but this much I will repeat—why, oh

why, did you not trust me? If I was disappointed not to receive a letter from you, I was grieved at the cause you assign for your silence. Charles, are you not aware that while your affection remains unchanged, you can do no wrong in my sight? Do you, can you doubt it?

“ISABELLA ROMAYNE.”

CHAPTER XII.

LADY RAMSAY, as we have seen, remained in London some days after Charles had left it. She felt the necessity of absolute rest, in order to prepare herself for the harrowing scene which she was about to encounter.

Her mind had been greatly tranquillised by the letter she had written to Isabella. The doctor chanced to call just after it was despatched. He was surprised at the improvement in his patient's state; the pulse no longer throbbed feverishly, its beatings were calm and regular. He congratulated himself upon his professional skill.

Many were the kind and curious inquiries made by Lady Ramsay's friends in general, and Sir James's heirs in particular. It was the end of the season—balls were over, and

breakfasts scarce. When the carriages came round to the doors of their fashionable owners, these fashionable owners were at a loss where to drive, so they were seized with overwhelming sympathy for poor dear Lady Ramsay, and ordered their coachmen to Belgrave-square.

Carriages thronged the door; the servants were plied with questions and bewildered with messages. Everbody was *so* shocked, *so* interested, *so* anxious to be of use. Innumerable were the tenders of service received by Lady Ramsay; these were pressed upon her with that eagerness natural to those who offer what they know will not be accepted.

The kind inquirers shook their heads incredulously at the servants' report. The heirs laughed outright. It was absurd to suppose that Lady Ramsay would really regret Sir James. No doubt she gave good extra pay for having such extravagant falsehoods seriously reported. Every one knew that she had done her duty by the poor invalid, her conduct towards him had been very praiseworthy, and so forth; but at the same time, nobody could doubt but that it was the result

of consummate worldly wisdom. Now this was carrying the farce too far. She must rejoice at having got rid of a troublesome burden. It was bad taste, it was ridiculous thus to overact her part.

These charitable surmises, false in the main, were yet, to a certain extent, true. Lady Ramsay really mourned her husband; but surely, if her sorrow had been quite genuine, it would have been less exaggerated. In her mind truth and falsehood were so curiously blended, that she was incapable of discerning the precise limits of either. Her sentiments were extravagant, and extravagance invariably implies a deficiency. Those who feel least say most. Expletives in writing, like emphasis in speaking, prove weakness in both. The prosaic deal in amplification and metaphor. Truth requires no ornament; it shines by its own light.

Excitement of one kind or other had always been a necessity to Lady Ramsay, therefore she nursed and fed her grief, and supplied it with fresh stimulants. She received and wrote letters without end; she devised and gave orders with respect to the solemn farce about

to be enacted. The funeral was to be upon a magnificent scale. Lady Ramsay determined to attend it in person.

If good little Aurora's exertions had been as well directed as they were well intentioned, she would, indeed, have been a valuable assistant on the present occasion. Unhappily such was far from being the case. Her only notion of relieving others, was to allow herself no rest. For Lady Ramsay she would gladly have worked herself to death; there she was, night and day, writing notes, reporting orders, and running up and down stairs to correct her own mistakes. She had always considered Lady Ramsay as a model of every human perfection; but now admiration had grown into a veneration which knew no bounds. That Lady Ramsay should be able, notwithstanding the intensity of grief, for which Aurora gave her credit, to reflect upon matters of business, and to superintend their execution, appeared to her simple mind a degree of virtue little short of sublime.

Aurora took upon herself the task of buying mourning, and put all the shopmen and women nearly beside themselves by the trouble she

gave them. Not, indeed, that she spared her own. “She was so anxious to choose well for dear Lady Ramsay—and choosing for another person is not like choosing for one’s self”—so she was determined to see *everything* before she finally decided upon *anything*. Unhappily, in her laudable desire to combine beauty with economy, she selected for Lady Ramsay a thick woollen stuff, unsuited to her embonpoint, and which was therefore given to the servants, though much too expensive for them. The widow’s cap too, which Aurora thought peculiarly appropriate, in virtue of its extraordinary ugliness, was not even tried on. The bare idea of her own face underneath it was sufficient for Lady Ramsay. She immediately ordered another, more becoming, and less orthodox. Aurora was much disappointed by these failures; but she consoled herself with the reflection, that the black cloth which she had bought for hangings for the grand hall and church at Eastrow, was exactly the right thing. She unrolled and surveyed it with great complacency, and sundry grunts expressive of self-gratulation. It must be confessed that these sable trappings did not suggest

quite such lugubrious feelings as they ought to have done. She had chosen them herself, and for once, chosen rightly; this reflection made her smile. But when she went on to consider, that the light of Mr. Smith's countenance would shine upon them, she did more than smile. We are sorry to say, she absolutely laughed.

Notwithstanding the endeavours of all parties to expedite matters, the departure did not take place as soon as was expected. It was not till nearly a week after Sir James's death, that the preparations were finished, and the party could set out for Eastrow.

It was a melancholy sight to see the weeping servants, all in deep mourning, crowding round Lady Ramsay when she arrived at the house, which had been so long her home; but which, in a short time, would become the property of an entire stranger. Sir James and Lady Ramsay had been kind to all their dependents, and were beloved by them. Lady Ramsay especially, was of a loving nature, and as she looked at the poor souls, from whom she must soon part, her heart over-

flowed, and she could not speak to them for sobbing.

Everywhere were associations of poor Sir James. When she saw his favourite chair, his sofa, and the little bed, beside which she had so often watched, she could hardly persuade herself that he was really gone. Several times in the night she started up, fancying that she heard his fond, feeble “Fanny!”

Next day was the funeral. The grand hall was hung with black. Massy folds of sable cloth waved from the ceiling to the floor; they were held back, at intervals, by silver sconces, bearing lights. In the centre stood a state bed, and upon it was the coffin, its huge velvet pall embroidered on each corner with large armorial bearings of silver. Nothing could be more splendid than these gloomy trappings.

Early in the grey of dawn, Lady Ramsay rose and stole silently to the chamber of death. A superstitious feeling called her thither. She wished once more to see the face of him who had loved her so dearly.

But she forgot that the coffin had been

nailed down. She was disappointed at losing the melancholy satisfaction she had expected. Should she never see that kind face more ? she thought within herself, and bursting into tears, she sunk upon her knees beside the state bed.

“ Fanny !” spoke a well-known voice, “ my poor Fanny.”

“ Oh, Frank, is it you ? thank God you are come.”

“ Isabella Romaine came with me ; she is gone to her room. I caught a glimpse of you upon the stairs, and I followed you here. Come into the garden, and let us talk.”

“ Good, kind brother ;” she put her arm in his, and they went out together. “ But why did Isabella not come to me at once ? Would not she like to see the last of him who was so kind to her ?” Lady Ramsay’s tears fell fast as she spoke. “ But she has no feelings of that sort. What you call superiority, I call insensibility.”

“ We will not now dispute about names. It was very kind as well as judicious of you to invite her here, and she is fully sensible of it. She does you ample justice.”

“ Tell me about Arethusa,” proceeded Lady

Ramsay, anxiously ; “ have you any news of her ? And how is my poor mother ? ”

“ Arethusa is married by this time.”

“ To that wretch Preston ? ” interrupted Lady Ramsay, angrily.

“ He used to be a greater favourite of yours than of mine,” replied Frank. “ However, as the thing is done, and he is now my brother-in-law, I must try to think the best I can of him.”

“ He has shamefully requited my kindness to him. As for Arethusa’s behaviour, it is worse than I could have believed possible. They deserve to starve, and I hope they will.”

“ No, Fanny, you do no such thing ; and you would be very angry with me if I were to let them.”

“ I hope you do not mean to give them any of your hardly-earned money. But my mother, where is my poor mother ? ”

“ Gone to join Arethusa. She set off for Paris the instant we heard where she was. She showed an energy and thoughtfulness that was quite extraordinary. We none of us knew the worth of our good kind mother.”

Little Aurora now came to call them in to an early breakfast. Despite the melancholy circumstances with which he was surrounded, Frank could hardly help smiling at the very queer expression of her face. Her eyes and nose were still red and swollen. Traces of tears were discernible in every chink and crevice of her puckery face; yet in the gathers about the mouth were certain marks denoting an odd sort of inward satisfaction, half humble, half important, forming a contrast exquisitely ludicrous. The upper half of her face was all sorrowful; but the under evidently concealed some secret joy, and the whole was big with portentous news.

“I’ve been to see Isabella,” she began; “only think, she told me I might call her Isabella, isn’t it nice? and she’s rather tired, because it is very fatiguing travelling all night; but it could not be helped, of course, so I made her lie down, and have her breakfast sent upstairs. Mr. Stanly is gone out; so I rather think he is not at home.” Aurora jerked out these last words so very funnily, that Frank laughed outright.

“Gone out!” exclaimed Lady Ramsay, sur-

prised ; “ where can he be gone to ? How strange to go out—to-day ! ”

“ Dear, not at all ; I beg your pardon, but I mean that *he* was here last night, and asked him quite by chance, because Mr. Stanly came in so suddenly, that we both started up ; and then he asked him to breakfast.”

“ Who asked who—what *do* you mean, Aurora ? ”

“ Dear ! now I hope you’re not angry. I thought I might see him—a clergyman, you know——”

“ Oh, I understand all about it,” said Lady Ramsay, herself half smiling at her little friend’s confusion. “ After all, I’m glad poor Charles went out to breakfast this sad morning.”

Aurora, by way of making tea, put a quantity of sugar into the teapot, and poured boiling water upon it. This mistake was no sooner rectified, than she poured the tea into the cream-jug, instead of into the teacup, and then upset both. In short, it would be an endless task to enumerate the blunders she made in the course of that memorable breakfast. At any other time, Lady Ramsay would

have been highly amused at her little friend's nervousness, of which she guessed the cause; but on the present occasion, all these absurdities passed unnoticed.

Presently voices were heard in the house, and Lady Ramsay rose to leave the room.

"You are surely not going down stairs?" said Frank, anxiously.

"Certainly. Would you have me neglect my last duty to the dead?"

With these words she disappeared. Frank followed her, and Aurora trotted after them.

There was a large assembly in the grand hall. There were the neighbours, the tenants, and the household, all in deepest mourning. When Lady Ramsay entered, they simultaneously got up, and a murmur of pity rose, like the sound of distant waters.

Lady Ramsay's grief broke out afresh, convulsive sobs burst from her, and she showed symptoms of fainting. Fortunately, Frank was close behind her, and his calm "Fanny!" restored her to some sort of self-possession. With all her affection for her brother, she had always a certain salutary fear of him. She took his arm, and he led her to the seat

prepared for her, bowing as she went along to those who were nearest her.

The rector came forward, and administered consolation, well intentioned, but ineffectual. Lady Ramsay responded by sobs to his pompous common-places.

The doctor, too, felt himself called to do his part. He put his finger and thumb upon her pulse, after the most approved professional fashion, and regarded her with looks ominous enough to produce the illness which it was his province to cure.

If at such a time anything could have excited mirth, it would have been the very comical expression of little Aurora's face; she had planted herself just opposite to Lady Ramsay, and, with ludicrous avidity, was taking in every syllable which fell from each of the worthies. Her hand, innocent of threat, shifted from one shoulder to the other like that of a Chinese mandarin. She seemed greatly impressed by the words of the medical gentleman, but when the young rector spoke, the grotesque symptoms of admiration her countenance exhibited baffled all powers of description.

After each had held forth to his heart's content, Lady Ramsay beckoned to her brother, who was standing with Charles, at some little distance from her, and whispered him to go and summon Isabella. He remonstrated, and endeavoured to convince her of the impropriety of such a meeting, at such a time; but Lady Ramsay insisted.

“Go, Frank!” she said. “It is cruel to refuse—perhaps the last request I shall ever make you. If you will not——”

Still Frank hesitated, but the expression of his sister's countenance showed that she was meditating a scene; Frank, therefore, obeyed her, as the lesser of two evils.

At the end of a few moments, Frank reappeared with Isabella. Lady Ramsay watched Charles, and was surprised that he showed so little astonishment when he saw her enter. She did not know that Frank had told him that she was in the house, in order to lessen the impropriety of the scene.

Isabella, without looking either to the right or to the left, walked forward, towards Lady Ramsay, who rose to receive her. It would be difficult to tell the conflicting feelings

which, at that moment, occupied the hearts of these two women as they embraced each other.

Lady Ramsay beckoned to Charles Stanly; he came forward with the calm self-possession of a man accustomed to act in public, and to conceal whatever emotions might be working within him. Lady Ramsay took his hand, and joined it to Isabella's. "It was *his* wish," she faltered, pointing to the coffin.

"May I prove myself not unworthy of your good opinion," said Charles, bending to Lady Ramsay. "It shall be the object of my life to deserve it. Isabella!" he added, turning towards the latter; "let me hope that you will accept the vows I so willingly pronounce."

She made no answer, either by word or look. She presently disengaged her hand, moved a few steps backwards, and stood still and immovable as a statue. Her heart beat almost to bursting, but she controlled feelings too sacred to be profaned by display.

Not so Lady Ramsay. She really felt a great deal, but she assumed much more; the combined result was hysterics, and a long fainting fit.

When she recovered her senses, she found herself upon the sofa, supported by Frank and Isabella. The coffin had been removed, and all the mourners were gone.

“Good Heavens !” she exclaimed. “What is this ? What does this mean ? Frank, why did you let them go without me ?”

“I thought it better for you, and better for all. Stay where you are, Fanny. Women have no business with public pageants.”

“Frank, how you talk ! Women have duties to fulfil, and this is a most sacred one. Come, let us go. I ought to be there now.”

“Stay, dear Fanny, I beseech you, stay. Women’s duties are at home ; they should not make display of them.”

“Display ! Nonsense. I *will* pay my last tribute to the dead. Are you not coming with me ?” she added, as she went towards the door.

“You did your duty while he lived, and that is enough,” he said, holding her gently back. “My dear sister, let me entreat you to remain where you are. You are not, or ought not, to be calm enough to appear as a quiet spectator of ceremonies which, to you

especially, must be painful in the extreme, and to interrupt the funeral rites by any extraordinary manifestation of grief would be indecent. Do let me persuade you to stay here."

"And let the order of the ceremony be disturbed; would that be showing proper respect for poor Sir James's memory? To leave vacant the place which was prepared for me in the church; how can you advise such irreverence towards the dead! Think what an appearance that would have!"

"If you cared much for the dead you would not think so much of appearance in the eyes of the living."

Lady Ramsay turned angrily away from her brother. "Come, Isabella! you will come with me, I am sure," she said, turning towards the latter.

"If you wish it, I will accompany you; else I had rather not," she added, with gentle sadness.

"Do you feel nothing for poor Sir James? For him who thought so highly of you—who loved you so well."

"It is on that account that the spectacle would be very painful to me. I can do him

no good now." Tears started in her eyes as she spoke.

Lady Ramsay perceived this, and was somewhat softened.

"As you will," she said; "such refinements are beyond me. I do not pretend to understand them. You may both stay at home, if you like; I shall certainly fulfil what I consider to be my duty." With these words she threw over her a large crape veil, and left the room. Frank was about to follow her, when Isabella detained him, saying:

"Shall I come with you? Your sister has been so kind to me, that I ought not, perhaps, to refuse her; but I have a strong dislike to making a parade of feeling."

"So have I. Do not think of coming." He was following his sister, when he suddenly stopped, went back to where Isabella stood, and took her hand. "You spoke a true word there—to parade feeling is revolting." He paused for a moment, as if he had fallen into a reverie, and then said, very slowly, "Oh, you are right, true feeling is always silent." He turned abruptly away, and hurried out of the room.

When Frank reached the church, he found that the service was nearly over, and that the body was just about to be lowered into the vault. Lady Ramsay had gone in the carriage, and thus arrived some time before him. As he expected, she was giving way to the extravagance of her grief. He arrived just in time to see her throw herself upon the coffin, and declare that she would be buried with her husband.

“ Oh don’t, dear Lady Ramsay, don’t,” screamed little Aurora. “ Pray don’t listen to her,” she added, turning to the bystanders. “ It would be such a shocking thing, you know. Oh, Mr. Smith, do persuade her not. I’m sure she’ll listen to you.”

Mr. Smith spouted forth a prodigious flood of rhetoric, which, though remarkable for truth, was less so for novelty.

“ Dear !” whispered Aurora, “ I never heard anything like it before. Did you, Lady Ramsay ?”

Lady Ramsay replied by calling out for scissors to cut off her hair, which, as it seemed, she intended to substitute for herself.

Aurora sobbed aloud at this dreadful idea.

However, as it was undoubtedly better that Lady Ramsay's hair should be buried than Lady Ramsay herself, she, after considerable fumbling in various pockets, produced a pair of scissors.

Lady Ramsay, with vehement gestures, cut off her beautiful hair, and flung it upon the coffin. Having done this, her grief seemed a little to subside ; still, every now and then, it broke out afresh.

When the ceremony was concluded, Lady Ramsay refused to leave the church. " I will not leave him," she exclaimed, frantically. " I cannot part from him—I will stay with him."

" Stop, Fanny!" said Frank, stepping forward, and holding her up with a firm grasp. " This is blasphemy. He is not there, and if you behave thus, can you expect to go where he is?"

These words, pronounced in a solemn whisper, produced their effect. Lady Ramsay let her brother draw her arm within his, and thus assist her to the carriage.

All the way home, neither Lady Ramsay nor Frank spoke a single word. They were

little inclined for conversation ; but had it been otherwise, Aurora left them no opportunity. She chattered and sputtered with more than her usual volubility.

“ Dear Lady Ramsay ! Was not it delightful, I mean dreadful, to hear him speak in that way ? There never was anything like it to be sure ; and if you had only come a little earlier, you never could have forgotten it, for it was so touching what he told us, that I’m ready to cry now. It was so beautiful what he said, that we must all die some time or other, rich or poor, old or young ; and that the young sometimes die before the old, which I’m sure is very true, when one comes to think of it ; and that all we can do to shorten or lengthen our lives, is of no use whatever, and when they are dead, all the regrets and tears in the world will not bring friends to life again, so the only thing we can do for them is to be kind to them while they live, which I’m sure you were, and be thankful that they were spared so long, which I am sure you ought to be.”

Here the carriage stopped at the door of the castle, and Aurora’s eloquence was brought to

an untimely close. She tumbled down the steps, knocking half the powder out of the footman's head with the front of her bonnet, and fell foul of the butler, who was standing at the door with a packet of letters in his hand.

“ Dear ! Well that *is* nice. We wanted something to enliven us on this melancholy day. Things do turn out well sometimes. ‘ A letter from dear Arethusa ! See here, Lady Ramsay ! Such a long letter from dear Arethusa, dated Paris, and so many nice words underlined. Shall I read it to you ? ’ ”

By this time, they had reached the boudoir. Lady Ramsay threw herself upon the sofa, Frank stood beside her, and Aurora read as follows :

“ ‘ Aurora, my *dearest* friend.’ Isn’t it nice her calling me her dearest friend. Dearest friend ! ” she repeated, in that sort of inward under tone, half nasal, half guttural, and peculiarly English. She went on : “ ‘ Do not accuse me of want of *trust*, or of *confidence*, in your long-tried friendship, but *love* has a higher and a holier claim. A friend is *much*, Aurora, but a husband is *more*.’ Dear ! only

think !—a husband ! Well, people do get husbands sometimes, there can be no doubt of that.” And little Aurora chuckled inwardly. “ ‘ I am *married*, Aurora. *Yesterday*, my fate was united to that of the *only* man on *earth* I ever really *loved*. Can you not *guess* who *that* is ? ’ Oh, it is not only extraordinary, but wonderful.

“ ‘ You cannot but have observed how, from the *first* moment he saw me, Mr. Preston was *struck* with me. He said nothing, but I read his *feelings* in those matchless eyes. I saw that he *loved* and *suffered*. Was *ever* woman placed in such a situation ? The struggle between delicacy and devotion was *dreadful*. Months, years passed ; this passion *increased*, and also his silence ; I saw it prey upon his *vitals*. When, last spring, he took my portrait he used to look at me in a *manner* which could not be misinterpreted, but still he spoke not. I gave him every encouragement which *maidenly* delicacy permitted, yet he persisted in his *cruel*, his *barbarous* silence. I saw it was killing him, but what could I do ? I saw him tremble and turn pale at the name of Lord John, yet he *generously* spoke in his

praise, and once even had the *magnanimity* to congratulate me on my future marriage! Was ever such self-abnegation? He then told me one day, "I am about to leave *England*." Was that not plain? He could not see me in the arms of another and live. All this and much more, so mildly, so simply expressed, in these few words: "I am soon going to leave *England*." At that heartrending declaration I nearly fainted; he must have seen my *feelings*, but was too *generous* to take advantage of my *weakness*. As I have since discovered, he shrunk from the idea of preventing me from making a brilliant marriage; he would have *died* sooner. But Arethusa Tyrrell was not to be vanquished in *generosity*. No, little did Harry Preston know her *then*. I invited him to that Richmond party when we all thought Lord John would propose; but he refused, I mean Mr. Preston; however, I insisted, and at last he consented. I wish you had been there to see the way in which he and Lord John looked at one another. It was *plain* that Lord John was *dreadfully* jealous of Mr. Preston. Still he did not propose; he certainly behaved

shamefully, after going such lengths. So I told Lord John, after dinner, that I would *not* walk with him, and took Mr. Preston's arm instead. How *triumphant* he looked at this marked preference. We walked in the park, and soon *all* was settled between us. I hardly know what passed, or I would repeat it to you, *dearest*. In fact, Harry said very little, but I saw how much he felt, so I spoke the *words* he had not *courage* to utter. He, *noble* soul! was averse to an elopement, for fear of compromising my reputation; but I clung to the idea of sacrificing *all*, even *reputation*, for the man I loved. He knows how to *appreciate* such *devotion*, and we are the *happiest* of the *happy*.

“ ‘Mamma arrived yesterday, just as we were going to the *mairie* to be married. She *insisted* upon accompanying us, though she had travelled all night. She is going on with us to Rome, which is *fortunate*, as without her assistance we should not have had money to get there. I would not let Harry stop to take any with him; indeed I am afraid he has very little; but, as I told him at Richmond, it does not signify, for I have a *good fortune* of

my own. I wish you would ask Frank to send it me, *poste restante*, Rome, where I hope *you* will also *write* to me.

“ ‘Yours, with unalterable affection,

“ ‘ARETHUSA PRESTON.’ ”

Lady Ramsay, despite her grief, smiled a little at the absurdity of this delectable epistle. “Poor Arethusa!” she exclaimed; “she is even a greater fool than I took her for. To want her fortune to be sent, *poste restante*, to Rome! And I never heard that she had any; where is it to come from?”

Frank was too much annoyed to be amused by such selfish folly in his own sister. “I always knew that she was a fool, poor thing,” he said; “but I had no idea that she was so heartless. It is very plain from her letter, that if she could have got Lord John to propose to her, she would never have married that coxcomb Preston; and he, I am afraid, only took her for the sake of the fortune which she has not got. It is a bad business altogether. Arethusa will rue her folly; not but that she deserves to do so. But my poor,

good mother, I am grieved to the heart for her."

"Well, for our mother's sake, we must not let Arethusa starve, I suppose," said Lady Ramsay.

"Starve!" exclaimed Aurora, in terrible alarm; "dear, how shocking! But you don't mean it, I'm sure—at least, not *quite*."

"Perhaps not quite," said Frank, smiling at Aurora's simplicity. "I dare say we shall be able, between us, to keep her from quite starving. Don't you think so, Fanny?"

Lady Ramsay's reply was interrupted by Charles, who rushed into the room with an open letter in his hand.

"What a confounded bore!" he exclaimed, but the expression of his face somewhat contradicted his words; he looked pleased and even elated—"what a confounded bore; I shall have to start for London instantly."

All inquired the cause of so sudden a resolution.

He rather flurriedly explained, that he had just received a letter from Lord Derwent, who, believing him to be still in town, desired to

speak to him early next day upon pressing business. "It is plain," Charles said, "that such a mandate cannot be refused. To keep so great a man waiting is not to be thought of." So Charles had nothing for it but to start forthwith, and to travel by night to London. He had already sent for a carriage to take him to the station.

He went to bid adieu to Isabella, but she was not within. Upon inquiring, he found that she had gone to the village to see a poor old woman who was ill, and who had desired to speak to her.

"What on earth can Isabella have to do with poor old women!" exclaimed Charles, very impatiently, to Frank.

"One of her former pensioners, I make no doubt," he replied.

"Pensioners! I did not know that she had pensioners. She never told me she had any. Very odd that I should not have known of her pensioning the poor!"

"I should have thought it odd if you had. Isabella talks little of her own concerns, especially of her charities. But she has always been in the habit of visiting the poor people

in the village. She has the peculiar art of talking to them as they like to be talked to. She knows how to instruct and to comfort them, at the same time."

"Well, I'm sure it is very good of her, and I should be glad to assist her if I could, and give them money if I had any; but as for sitting with them, and talking to them—— Isabella too, has little enough money to spare——"

"A kind word often comforts more than money."

"That is all very fine. But what on earth made her go after poor women just now? Any other time would have done as well, and I want to speak to her before I set off."

"Isabella could not know by inspiration that you were going away."

"But how am I to see her? I must speak to her before I go. Can't she be sent for?"

"The woman lives at the farther end of the village. Since you are in such a hurry, the best way would be for you to go to her. Shall I take you?"

"And get up a scene of sentiment with an

old woman as audience. No, thank you, I can't stand that; but what on earth could have put it into her head to go and see old women just now!"

Frank shrugged his shoulders, and was leaving the room, when Charles called him back.

"Since I *must* go without seeing her, I wish, Tyrrell, that you would tell her all about it. Explain why I was obliged to be off at a moment's notice. I'm quite certain from the tone of Lord Derwent's letter, that my trouble will be well repaid. I shall leave London as soon as I can after the interview—and—you might as well say that I hope Isabella will be at Overdale before I get there. I should never have courage to face my beloved uncle if she is not there to smooth the way for me. I don't want to hurry her off, you know; but you might suggest—— By Jove! here's the carriage——" And with a hasty shake of the hand, he sprang into it, and was off.

Isabella did not come home for some time afterwards. Frank was waiting for her at the door.

He told her of Charles's departure, laid a good deal of stress upon the flattering, but at the same time, the peremptory tone of Lord Derwent's letter, which made Charles's presence in London indispensable; and was purposely indistinct respecting the time at which Charles had received it, so that Isabella might imagine that he was hurried off without one moment's delay.

Notwithstanding all these precautions, Isabella turned very pale, and it cost her a painful struggle to suppress her emotion. After a few moments' silence, she said, anxiously, "Is there a night train that will take me north?"

There was. But Frank endeavoured to persuade her to remain at Eastrow till the next morning. He urged that the fatigue of another journey, before she had rested from her former one, would be very imprudent, and might make her quite ill. All his entreaties were, however, vain.

"I am not afraid of bodily fatigue," she replied; "my mind will not be at rest as long as I remain here. I should be afraid lest Charles

should reach Overdale before me. I know he wishes me to be present when he meets his uncle."

Frank had not told her of Charles's injunction to that effect; he rejoiced that he had not done so.

Finding that she was determined to go that same night, Frank offered to accompany her. But Isabella would not hear of his leaving Lady Ramsay in her present state of distress. Frank yielded the more readily, as it was necessary that he and his sister should immediately consult together, respecting what was to be done for Arethusa. As he told Isabella, this reason weighed with him perhaps more than any other.

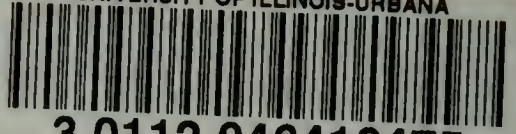
Lady Ramsay was both surprised and displeased, when her brother told her of Isabella's decision. She said that it was unkind of Isabella to leave her so soon; that as her behaviour at the funeral had been strange and cold, she might have stayed and endeavoured to make up for it. In short, Lady Ramsay was angry, though she hardly could tell why, and determined to find fault with Isabella, though she did not know for what.

Aurora was dreadfully disappointed. She had *so* many things to tell Miss Romaine, *so* many questions to ask; and she had really begun to think that perhaps Miss Romaine might answer some of them—almost. She wanted to see Charles and her together, just to have an idea how engaged people looked, in case she should ever herself be in a similar predicament. However, she contented herself with the reflection, that Miss Romaine's going away would not prevent Mr. Smith from proposing, if he really had a mind to do so; and, moreover, that as all engaged people did not probably look exactly alike, the behaviour of Charles and Isabella might not offer any precise parallel with herself and Mr. Smith. “So, after all,” she sagely concluded, “it does not very much signify her going. Mr. Stanly is quite different from Mr. Smith, certainly, and I am not like Miss Romaine either—so that even if we were to be an engaged couple, we should never look like them—exactly.” And she forgot her disappointment as the delightful image of Mr. Smith rose up before her mind, as she had seen him that morning in full canonicals. So

she grunted, with triumphant satisfaction, as she thought within herself, "Mr. Stanly may be very nice, certainly ; but he never can look so well, or wear a dress like *that*."

END OF VOL. II.

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